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DREW RECEIVED A BLOW ACROSS THE FACE THAT FLATTENED HIM TO THE GROUND

EDWARD L. WHEELER'S

DEADWOOD DICK, JR., NOVELS

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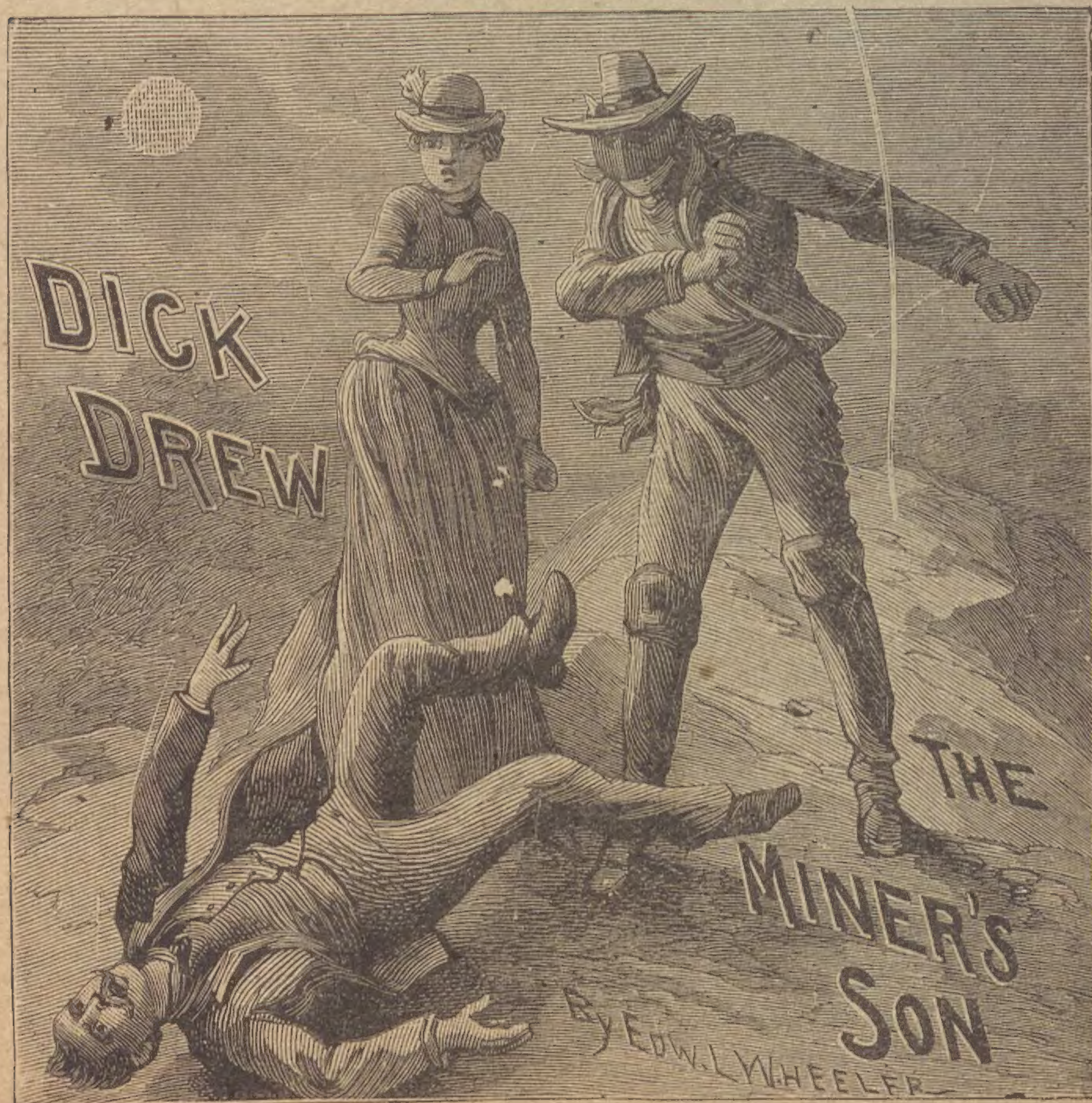
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Vol. IV.



DREW RECEIVED A BLOW ACROSS THE FACE THAT FLATTENED HIM TO THE GROUND.

Dick Drew, THE MINER'S SON.

OR,

Apollo Bill, the Road-Agent.

A Story of the Mines.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF THE "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS,
"YREKA JIM," "DENVER DOLL,"
"SIERRA SAM," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE WORK OF A WOLF.

It was a cosy little home, even though in mid-prairie.

You have, perhaps, read of an oasis in the desert. It was not a desert that surrounded this cosy little home, for broad and fertile prairies stretched away toward the setting sun, while a range of rugged hills loomed up to the eastward.

There was a snug little frame farm house, painted white, and set down with a fringe of elm-trees; there were barns, and other out-buildings to match; in front of the house beautiful beds of flowers were in full bloom, while acres of nodding corn and grain were to be seen, not far away, with other large tracts of ground in the vicinity where sheep, cattle and horses were peacefully grazing.

It was a cosy little home indeed, and everything about the place seemed to argue that the greatest peace and harmony existed between those who dwelt there, while thrift and industry were visible at every point.

It is a bright sunny morning in the latter part of May when we look down upon this home. The sun had just risen above the eastern horizon, and webs of dew yet hung upon the grass. Birds were making song in the elms; the low of cows upon the prairie came in on the morning breeze.

In the rear porch of the dwelling, overlooking the fields of grain, stood a woman, busied at churning with one of the old-fashioned dash churns. She was young and tidily dressed, and not handsome, as critics would declare, yet in her modest demeanor—in the soft quiet of her brown eyes, and the pleasant expression upon her round face, there was much to interest and attract.

In the doorway of the porch were playing two little girls, each holding home-made doll-babies and singing to them. Two children more alike in every respect it would have been hard to find. There was no particular difference in their size; each had sunny flaxen hair, blue eyes, and were very much alike in countenance; in fact, seen in two different places, they would have been pronounced one and the same. Their attire was exactly alike, too, and both seemed blessed with a sunny nature.

Yet, strange as it might seem, these little ones bore no relation to each other whatever.

Just within the porch, near the industrious

woman at the churn, sat an aged lady in a comfortable easy rocker, engaged at knitting, while she fondly gazed at the little seven-year-olds. She was a motherly-looking woman, whose face bore but few of the marks of time, but whose hair was white with the frosts of advanced years.

"The dear little angels, Mary," she said, turning to the maiden at the churn—"how well I can remember when I was a little girl, even though it was so many years ago. No news from Bill yet, Mary?"

"None, Mrs. Blake. I saw Tom Tabor a little while ago, on his way home from the Post, but he did not know anything how the contest came out. The votes were not all counted when he came away."

"Well, that is some consolation, at least. I am so afraid my dear, brave boy will get into trouble. I can well wish he had never run for sheriff, although I doubt not he will make a good one."

"Of course he will! Master Bill is very popular all over the county, except with those of the ruffianly sort, and they're not of much account."

"But very powerful. They have had pretty much their own way since Owl-Eye has been sheriff, and I suppose will stick by him, while they will be very ugly toward Bill, I am afraid."

"Don't worry on that score, aunty. Your son is brave enough to face the lot of them single-handed, and they know it."

"Yes! yes! William is a good, brave boy, and I have great confidence in him. Poor fellow! married so young and had to part with his wife inside of one year. It would have driven a most young man reckless. Do you know, Mary, I do not believe my son will ever marry again?"

"Perhaps not," said Mary, turning her face toward the glowing sun, to hide an expression something akin to regret. "I suppose he is quite happy with you and his child."

"Yes, and do you know I believe he loves Lord Clifford's child nearly the same as his own?"

"It would seem so to the observer, but the father affection goes to little Nell," Mary responded.

At this juncture Mary was called to attend to some household duty, and the conversation dropped for the time being.

"I fancy Mary has different hopes about my son's marrying again," Mrs. Blake mused to herself. "Well, Mary is a good, honest girl, has been a mother to the children since she came, and I don't know as William could do any better, were he inclined to again choose a partner for life. But laws! I don't believe he will ever marry again."

And Mary did have different ideas. A poor farmer's daughter though she was, she had a true and tender heart, and if she admired brave Bill Blake, and aspired to some day become his wife, it was one of her own secrets.

She went down to the clear, cool spring at the roots of one of the elms awhile later, for a pail of water, and while there took a photograph from her bosom.

It was that of a handsome, manly face of a

person of some five and twenty years—a clear-cut Anglo-Saxon face, expressing courage, firmness, and power to love or hate.

The head was set off with a broad-rim slouch hat, tipped gracefully back; the hair was worn long, down upon the shoulders. He sported a graceful mustache, curling at the ends; a narrow goatee ornamented his chin; his hunting-shirt, open at the throat, was of buckskin; and taken all in all, one would travel many a mile in the Wild West before encountering a finer specimen of hardy, sturdy manhood.

And Mary Monk gazed upon the picture with eyes glistening with pride and enthusiasm.

"He gave it to me," she murmured, "and told me always to keep it as a keepsake from him. If he did not have some little care for me, why did he give it, and why is he always so kind and considerate to me? Ah! perhaps it is because I care for his children."

Afternoon came, but with it came not William Blake home from the Post, where he had gone the previous day to election—he being run on one party ticket, against one Owl-Eye, alias Ben Boghart, a notorious rough, who had had one term of the office.

Mother Blake sat in her old cushioned chair, and rocked impatiently to and fro, for she was greatly worried over her son's non-return.

"I wouldn't worry, aunty," Mary said, by way of comforting, although she had some misgivings herself. "Probably Mr. Bill has been detained on account of business connected with the election, and will be home by dark."

But night drew on apace, and Bill Blake did not return.

"Where is my papa, grandma?" little Nell began to ask, while little Maude seemed equally concerned.

"Alas! I do not know, child," Mother Blake had to answer. "I feel as if some evil had befallen him."

"I will go for the cows myself, and tell the herd-boys to 'tend to the other chores," Mary said, "and if Mr. Blake has not returned by that time, I will ride over to the Post, and see what is the cause of his delay."

"Bless you, child—I wish you would."

And so Mary set bravely out upon the prairie toward the grazing-fields to tell the herdsmen what to do, at the same time carrying one of the little flaxen-haired girls with her.

"It will be dark before I can get back, I fear," she mused, "but then, I ought not to be afraid of the dark. A woman can afford to do much for those she loves. But I do wonder what has become of Mr. Bill? It looks as if something was amiss—his not returning. Oh, I hope no ill has befallen him!"

Mary had not been gone over an hour, and night was settling her somber mantle over hill and dale, when a band of horsemen dashed down from the eastern mountains, and drew rein in a gully, or *arroyo*, in the prairie, not over a thousand yards from the Blake homestead.

They were a rough-looking gang, mostly past the middle age, and of the class familiarly denominated as "toughs" on the frontier. They were, for the main part, men whom some cir-

cumstance had made reckless and unruly, and in whose soured, embittered natures there was little that was good.

All were armed with belt weapons and rifles, and were dressed in the commonest and dirtiest kind of garments.

As soon as they came to a halt, one of the crowd, with extremely large eyes, and who appeared as though he might have once seen better days, rose in his stirrups, and looked his companions over.

"Boyees," he said, in a voice deep and hoarse in its intonation—"boyees, I reckon you all know sumthin' why I ordered ye here."

There was a general shaking of heads in the negative.

Evident it was that these border roughs had followed the large-eyed man thither, without understanding what was to happen.

"Waal," continued the speaker, "I wull tell ye. Ye all know what happened yesterday. One o' the best sheriffs this county has ever known—being myself—was, at yesterday's election, defeated in favor of a young braggart and swell-head, Bill Blake by name. Ye all know what sort of a devil this Blake is—ye know he hain't got no more respect for us fellers than he has for a coyote, an' would jest as lief shute us as he would a coyote. Another thing, I opine ye've all kind of an ijeer thet et warn't on fair count that he was rung in fer the office."

A murmur of assent broke from the listeners.

This man Owl-Eye was a man after their own pattern, and they were not unmindful of the fact that, during his administration, he had protected them rather than arrested them for various crimes.

And Bill Blake was not the lad to do that; quite the contrary; so they gave another unanimous grunt expressive of the sympathy with Owl Eye.

"Yes, I see you're with me," the defeated candidate went on; "an' I opine ye war all present at the Post yesterday when I called Blake a liar an' he mopped up all ther mud in the street wi' me, arter which I swore ter hev vengeance. That's jest what brings me heer now. Over yander is the hum o' Blake an' his family. Thar's no one thar now but two women an' a couple o' kids. My purpose around heer to-night is to make that place luk so sick that our new sheriff won't know et when he comes home. Ef you're with me ye can bet yer services will be appreciated!"

Later that evening, by at least three hours, a horseman was galloping over the prairie, eastward bound. He held the bridle-reins loosely in hand, for the fine animal he bestrode seemed to be familiar with the route over which they dashed through the darkness.

A man of superb form was the rider, and clad in usual citizen's clothing, with the exception of a tastefully-embroidered hunting-shirt of buckskin and a slouch "prairie" hat. His face and general appearance were the same as that in Mary Monk's picture, and this was William Blake, the newly-elected sheriff.

As he rode, his gaze was fixed constantly to the eastward, where the horizon was lit up with

a vivid, fiery glow, and his face was eager and anxious in its expression.

"It is a fire!" he said, "but God knows I hope it is not my little home. I am inclined to think it is still further to the eastward, but I may be mistaken."

Urging his horse into a swifter gallop they dashed along, each seeming the most anxious to reach the destination before them.

Nearer and nearer they approached it as the miles flew by, and the light now grew gradually less, until finally but a faint tinge was visible upon the horizon.

Then the moon came up, and the glow disappeared altogether. Finally Blake reached a high swell of land in the vicinity of his home, and his eagle eyes swept the scene before him only to confirm his worst fears.

Where once had stood his cosy home and out-buildings, was nothing now but a mass of smoldering ruins.

With a hoarse cry of agony he drove his spurs into the horse's flanks, and the intervening distance was quickly covered, and hatless and wild-eyed, Bill Blake stood where once had been the entrance to his pretty home.

He saw the live bed of glowing coals; he saw fallen timbers and indestructible articles lying here and there; he saw a few of his herders standing silently, tearfully by; but it was all in a passing glance, for his eyes became riveted upon an object lying but a few feet from him, which filled his soul with utter horror.

It was the scalp of a flaxen-haired child!

CHAPTER II.

THE TRAIL TORNADO.

PEOPLE, as a rule, who are averse to reading the so-called sensational novel of far western life, are naturally ignorant of many of the phases of that life which history does not hand down, or newspaper writers do not develop, in detail.

Consequently, when curiosity prompts one of these to pick up a novel and read about the doings of some particular road-agent, ruffian or rascal, he unhesitatingly pronounces it a fabrication, unfit for perusal by the rising generation, when perhaps the same day's issue of his local newspaper contains editorials upon the immoral effects of novel reading, on one page, and on the opposite, shocking reports of murders, outlawry and domestic scandals, unfit alike for young or old to read.

Road-agents and ruffians have existed for several generations, in the wild Western country, and are likely to do so for many generations to come, much to the disgust and terror of the peaceably-disposed citizen.

As a rule, this class is only a few degrees less rough and to be feared, than the typical border ruffian; but, circumstances have been chronicled of a brave and gallant man, with a spice of nobility in his heart, who had taken to the profession of stage-robbery, more on account of some secret life trouble, than taste for the business itself.

But in truth, these are rare instances; the average road bandit is a veritable human grizzly, waiting to embrace you along some lonely

mountain trail, and his work is as detestable as his character is vile.

The stage from Gilder's Bend to McGuffin's, was what the miners of those two flourishing mining towns called weekly; it aimed to reach one place or the other, once a week, and tried to get back the next; at any rate, its dates for arrival and departure were a thing omitted from the schedule of certainties.

The distance between the two towns was only thirty miles, but the trail was a wild one, steep, sidelong and precipitous.

But we find the cumbersome vehicle *en route* for McGuffin's, one moonlit evening in May, nearly two years after the events narrated in the preceding chapter.

For a wonder it was not loaded down with passengers, as was usually the case.

Old Corkleg, *alias* Jem Stubbs, sat serenely upon the driver's box, holding back with might and main, his fractious six-in-hand, of handsome bays, and uttering discordant screeches of song, once in awhile, with a view to livening up his passengers.

The only outside passenger was seated beside the driver—an ordinary looking man, who might or might not have been a miner, and who was bewhiskered, and well-armed.

Within the coach rode three persons—two males, and a young lady.

The first of the two men was evidently an Englishman, and was a person of rather portly proportions, and full, florid countenance, ornamented with a pair of gray mutton-chop whiskers. His eyes were black, his mouth large and firm in its expression, and his hair mixed with gray.

His attire was rich and stylish, and that he was a man of culture, at least, if not a man of wealth and affluence, was evident.

The second person was a "heathen Chinese," but not the ordinary run of Chinamen, who was very richly dressed, *a la Americaine*. His feet were incased not in sandals but in patent-leather boots, then came a faultlessly fitting suit of clothes of a rich gray color, set off with collar cuffs and tie; then a jaunty Derby hat which any sport well might have envied.

The third passenger, the young lady, was probably well-dressed, but a gray duster concealed her under attire. She wore a jaunty hat, and was quite pretty of face and figure, having dark brown hair, a tolerably fair complexion, dancing black eyes, and a mouth habitually pleasant in expression.

But the rolling and jolting of the ponderous stage, brought little frowns of displeasure to her face, at which the Englishman smiled.

"Judging by your expression, I suppose you will not cherish tender memories of some of our stage journeys in Western America, my Lady Theresa!" he said, good-naturedly.

"No, my lord. The American highways are perfectly horrible—enough to drive one distracted, I might say," was the languid reply.

"Have you any idea we shall reach our journey's end, to-night?"

"Oh! yes, I presume we shall. I was assured the next stop was but ten miles from Gilder's Bend."

"It seems as if we have come fifty already. What is the name of the next place?"

"It is called McGuffin's."

"Oh! dear. Worse and worse. Another odious mining town, of course?"

"It is. I expect to meet Lawyer Pringle there with news."

"Vain hope, my lord, I fear. I have no longer any hope that your mission will be successful."

"I have every reason to believe I shall find my little lost one. Perhaps our friend, here, can give us some information concerning our destination? How is it, sir? Do you know aught of the place called McGuffin's?"

"Chinee man muchee know. McGuffin's mining town—belly bad place. Melican man belly bad, allee samee like Injin. Shootee like debil," was the Celestial's reply, as he retied the ribbon to his queue.

"Very comforting, indeed," Lady Theresa declared, with a sniff of disgust.

"Oh, never fear. No harm will come to us. What is your name, young man?" the Englishman asked.

"Chin Chin. Nicee young Chinee man. No wash shirtee likee common folks: allee samee like Melican man!" was the somewhat self-assuring reply.

"So I should judge," Lord Clifford remarked dryly. "I dare say, seeing that you yet retain y'ur queue, you some day intend returning to China."

"Don'tee know. Melica nice place—makee lots money, here—mebbe marry Melican girl an' settle down here."

Lady Theresa laughed; it seemed absurd to her that any sensible white girl could think of a Mongolian as a husband.

The stage bounded on, now, with greater din, as they began to descend the dugway, toward McGuffin's.

"Hold ter yer grip," Old Corkleg yelled. "We're doin' ther narrows, now, an' aire liabie ter whop over ther precipice inter ther next world in the jerk of a lamb's tail; an' ef ye hain't fixed things up, an' posted yer books fer ther futur', now's ther healthiest opperchunity ye're likely to get."

Lady Theresa turned pale; Lord Clifford looked decidedly nervous and alarmed; but Chin Chin smiled his entire indifference.

"By heavens! we shall all be killed, for coming in this rough vehicle," Lord Clifford exclaimed.

But Chin Chin shook his head knowingly.

"No be muchee 'fraidee. Chin Chin know drivee belly muchee. No gettee hurt. Corklegee muchee joke; allee samee like Yankee."

"Then, do you mean to say that there is no danger—that it's all to frighten us?"

"That's de sizee of it, allee samee likee Melican man. Melican man belly cutee, but no foolee Chinee man."

"Thank Heaven," Lord Clifford breathed.

"I admire you for those comforting words," Lady Theresa sighed, regaining somewhat of her former composure.

"Chin Chin belly muchee happy for compliment!" the Celestial said, dropping on his knees in the aisle between the seats. "Makee muchee

love to Melican girl, allee samee likee Melican man! Fire off big heapee joss!"

But at this instant the ponderous stage came to a most abrupt and uncereemonious halt, and unlucky Chin Chin was sent with terrific force against the coach door, which flew open, and the Celestial Romeo was spilled out upon the ground.

Lady Theresa and Lord Clifford were both considerably shaken up, and seeing the way open bounced out upon the ground in some haste.

The moon was pouring down a flood of light upon a scene of rugged and picturesque beauty. On one hand great jagged cliffs rose to a tremendous height, while on the opposite side of the narrow wagon-trail was a sheer, black abyss, of seeming unfathomable depth. A few paces in front of the halted coach stood a dozen men, attired in suits of red flannel, with top-boots upon their feet, jaunty sombreros upon their heads and crape masks upon their faces from forehead to chin, with only a slight aperture for the eyes and mouth. Each of these picturesque-appearing fellows had his right hand outstretched toward the coach, and in the hands, each, was a cocked revolver, while in the rear stood a similar number of figures, while two more burly knights of the trail stood at the heads of the leader horses.

Lord Clifford and Lady Theresa both saw and comprehended. They had heard stories of these gents of the road, but until now had never had a glimpse of them.

"Ha! what does this mean?" Lord Clifford demanded.

"Waal, I opine et means a genuine surprise-party, ice cream an' frosted jelly cake thrown in!" Old Corkleg answered, from his perch on the box. "These hyar pilgrims aire missionaries, I reckon, gatherin' in Sunday shekels ter send tew the heethyun down in New Jarsey an' Injy, an' sech like sinful sections."

"Ha! ha! you are not a bad guesser!" a rather jovial voice cried, and one of the road-agents in the rear of the coach, who wore a plume in his hat, advanced a few paces toward Lord Clifford and lady. "We are missionaries, but our mission is to toll this trail for our own benefit rather than for that of the heathen. This is rather a light load you have brought us, my noble Jebu!"

"I guess they ain't up ter average in numbers," Corkleg replied, "but ye orter take small favors as they cum. P'raps ef ye'd 'a' sent me a postal keerd that ye'd be hyar, I might 'a' brought along a better crowd."

"No doubt. But I don't like that kind of receptions. How's the state of your treasure-box, driver?"

"Mebbe ye kin find out!" was the gruff response.

"Undoubtedly. Apollo Bill's men never back down for one little safe. Boys, open the treasure-box, and hand me the contents."

"Oh! my diamonds! my diamonds!" Lady Theresa cried, clasping her hands.

"Fear not, lady! I'll take care of them," Apollo Bill assured, with mocking politeness, "and you can redeem them at any time within one year, by hunting me up and paying for

them. If you passengers have any money or trinkets you think I might like, you will greatly expedite matters and save yourselves trouble, by handing them over!"

What use to resist?

The passengers were "tolled"; the treasure-box was blown open and its contents extracted; then the stage was ordered to move on.

So the passengers got aboard, and Corkleg let his animals out at a faster rate of speed than they had ever gone before; and as they tore on toward McGuffin's, Lord Clifford turned to Lady Theresa, and said:

"Do you know that I believe I am at last on the right track?"

CHAPTER III.

DICK DREW.

INSIDE of five hours after the events last related, the name of Apollo Bill had received an introduction in the hearing of every citizen of McGuffin's, and his fame was made.

Lord Clifford and his niece, Lady Theresa, arrived at the little miner's camp without further delay or accident, and put up at the only hotel the place afforded, which was rather a monstrous edifice of logs and boards, and a combination of hotel, saloon and gambling-house, under the management of one Jerry Forbes.

My lord and lady were shown to a dingy, ill-furnished pair of rooms, which they were assured were the only first-class apartments the establishment boasted, and were further informed by the eye-to-business Jerry, that as trade and demand for accommodations was large, the ones who spent the most at the bar were usually shown the most favors, and protected in case of a row.

Lord Clifford and the lady did not add any testimony to Old Corkleg's story of the stage-robbery—there was no need of that, for the aged Jebu pictured the incident in glowing colors as may well be imagined, considering his ability as a narrator.

Corkleg did not believe in doing things by halves, and made Apollo Bill out in the guise of a ferocious typical Italian brigand, who had blood in his eyes, and a complement of butcher-knives in his belt.

Road-agents had heretofore been the least of the troubles of the McGuffinites, and they were now naturally excited, if not alarmed, at the close proximity of the light-fingered and by no means bashful gents of the road.

McGuffin's was a town of some six to seven hundred inhabitants, not including the floating population, and unlike some mining towns, the ruffian element did not hold the predominance. To be sure they were nearly all a rough crowd, these citizens, but unless some unusual circumstance occurred to "r'ile" them, they were generally peaceably disposed, except the usual Saturday night spree, evidences of which are ever to be found in all towns from California to Bismarck.

And this being Saturday night, at least two-thirds of the adult male population were out on

a "tear," with little other purpose in view than to have some fun, spend their week's hard earnings, and imbibe freely of the vile decoctions handed out over the bar in Western mining towns.

The story of the stage robbery hit these wide-awakes on the sensitive spot, and for what information he vouchsafed, they "sat 'em up" so lively for old Corkleg that he was "several seas over" ere he had finished his thrilling narrative, and was obliged to sit down and keep mum.

No one was then left to look to for information except Chin Chin, the dandy Celestial, and he was unceremoniously trotted out into the bar-room, ordered to mount a barrel and explain his recent adventure, or pass in his chips.

This latter expression was equivalent to sure death, and enough of mining life had Chin Chin seen to be cognizant of the fact that he was in deadly peril.

Therefore he mounted the barrel with grace and alacrity.

"Now, looker hyar, you pig-tailed son of a washee-washee," exclaimed Modest Mike, the typical bullwhacker, bruiser, and ruffian-general who looms up conspicuously in the average Western mining town, until some better man comes along and deprives him of his spurs; "see hyar, you almond-eyed, flat-mugged nigger! We, ther representative citizens o' this hyar burg, do command yer to make a clear breast of this road-agent bizness, wi'out any palaver or superfluous gab, and the sooner ye do it, the safer will be your queue—sart'in sure!"

"Melican man gittee Melican man drunkee!" Chin Chin said, wisely. "Let Melican man gittee Chin Chin drunk, too, and he tellee muchee heep news, allee samee."

"Not by a durned sight, you chop-stick rat-eater—nary a time! Not a drop of anything kin ye hev till ye guv us a concise statement of the facts of the stage robbery!"

"Belly well, Chin Chin nottee know much Stage stop belly sudden, an' Chin Chin go head ober heels outee door, allee samee like debbil. Melican man raise Chin Chin up by queue. Melican man dressee in red, with big hatee an' mask. Melican man rob Chin Chin of allee money; den we gittee board stage muchee quickee and comee here."

"And the cuss who cavorted at the head of this gang bailed to the name of Apollo Bill, did he?"

"Yes, he belly muchee nicee looking man, allee samee likee a god of joss."

The morning following the arrival of Lord Clifford and a lady in McGuffin's was a pleasant one. The air was pure and bracing, with just enough force to soothe the every sense, warmed as it was by mellow beams of radiant sunshine, and scented with gentle fragrance of the out-leaving forests and early flowers.

Birds filled the morning air with their melody; the boisterous but not unmusical shouts of the miners going to their work; the hum of insects—all combined to make it a cheerful, dreamy and luxuriant dawning of day; at least, so thought Lady Theresa, as she strolled about the rude settlement.

There was nothing picturesque or even romantic about McGuffin's. There were half a hundred or more of rude unpainted shanties and cabins, situated at the very foot of a rugged mountain, upon a level sandy bar or bend, around which the muddy waters of a deep, dark stream surged with sullen murmur.

All the mines were reached by means of drifts or tunnels into the base of the mountain, except one or two small unpaying surface claims on the bend itself.

What there was romantic about the place to a lady of her refined and society-cultured tastes, Lady Theresa could not conceive, but the air was very pure and refreshing, and so she wandered on.

There were but two streets, running from the base of the mountain to the river's edge, and Lady Theresa was upon the steep bank of the latter, looking down into the dark muddy waters, when she heard a footstep behind her, and turned to behold a young man, perhaps a little older than herself approaching.

He was well dressed, wore a plenitude of good jewelry, and was of good form. His face was well chiseled and fair to gaze upon, and his graceful curling mustache and well-trimmed hair were of blonde color, and his eyes of clearest blue.

Although somewhat surprised and alarmed at his intrusion, Lady Theresa was too self-possessed to betray the fact, and stood regarding him with a cool stare that must have confused any ordinary person.

As he drew nearer, the blonde stranger tipped his hat as gracefully as a Fifth avenue swell could have done.

"Ah! pardon my seeming intrusion," he said, bowing, "but I believe—I trust I have the pleasure of addressing the charming Lady Theresa—niece of Lord Clifford, of Clifford Cliff, England—or, can it be possible I have made a mistake—"

And a look of much concern came over his face.

"You have made no mistake, sir—but I am at a loss to conceive how you should know anything about me," Lady Theresa replied, promptly and haughtily.

"Oh! I dare say you are puzzled, and had I not possessed some knowledge of you and Lord Clifford, I should never have presumed to address you. I trust you like our little city?"

"Hardly. I have not seen anything about it, as yet, to fall particularly in love with. Until I have some better recommend of you than that accorded by self-introduction, I will excuse you, sir."

And her ladyship turned again to gaze out upon the river.

The dandy's face flushed for an instant at the rebuff, but only for a moment, when he said, pleasantly:

"Of course you are doing a perfectly proper thing, we being strangers, but I hope to have the pleasure of renewing your acquaintance, after I have formally introduced myself to his lordship. Good-morning!"

Lady Theresa was conscious that he tipped his hat, and then retreated down the street, when she burst into a laugh.

"Such a gallant, indeed!" she said; "but then, he may be of use to me."

The individual who had so informally introduced himself to Lady Theresa, was known at McGuffin's as Dick Drew.

He was the adopted son of the only professed aristocratic family in the mining town, and like the generality of adopted sons, felt himself of great importance, while at the same time he was a thoroughbred scapegrace.

He was at times dissipated, and a gambler of no mean accomplishments, and there were few, if any, who had any great amount of love for him, notwithstanding his rather fascinating appearance.

Immediately after quitting the presence of Lady Theresa, young Drew went to the hotel, and inquired if Lord Clifford was to be seen.

As Drew was a good patron of the establishment, the obliging barkeeper immediately sent a servant to ascertain if his lordship was in his room, and found that such was the case. Drew was accordingly ushered up to the gentleman's apartment, where the visitor was pleasantly received, and requested to be seated. Without hesitation Drew seated himself in the easiest chair in the room, and helped himself to a cigar from Lord Clifford's holder which stood upon the stand, within reach.

"Ah! yes—a very pleasant morning, indeed!" he began, scratching a match upon his boot, and lighting up. "You, presumably, are Lord Clifford, of Clifford Cliff hamlet, England—are you not?"

"I am," was the nobleman's reply. "Whom have I the honor of addressing?"

"I am Richard Drew, at your service, son of the Honorable Darcy Drew of this place—one of the most prominent capitalists and mine-owners of the region."

"Ah! I see. Well, sir, can I do anything for you this morning, Mr. Drew?"

"Aw! no—that is, I dare to presume I can do something for you," was the somewhat surprising reply. "Hearing of your arrival and misfortune, I dared believe that I—"

"Thanks! I anticipate your intended kindness, but though deprived of what ready cash I had on my person last evening, I have a sufficient letter of credit from the Bank of North America, New York, to supply any demand I may need at present."

"A very handy thing to have, indeed. But, if I cannot help you in one way, very surely I can in another. I believe it was your fortune to possess, not long since, an *avant courier* by the name of Pringle?"

"Certainly. What of him?"

"What of him remains is deposited six feet under *terra firma*, down at Gray's Ford, where, in the vernacular of the mines, he 'passed in his chips' about a week since."

"Pringle dead? How know you this?"

"I fell in with him as a traveling companion, and attended him during his last moments. He confided to me his mission to this country in search of your lost child, and requested me to meet you here on your arrival and tell you he had been unsuccessful."

"Poor fellow! I suppose he had enough money to bury him?"

"He had not, but I buried him at my own expense. That, however, is nothing worthy of further mention."

"Think not so. You shall receive whatever sum you expended on him. Of what did he die?"

"Heart disease, combined with pneumonia."

"Ah! I was aware he had an affection of the heart, but did not think he would be carried off so suddenly. And you know of my mission to this country?"

"I do, and I doubt not I can place you face to face with the man who knows what has become of your lost child."

"You tell me this?"

"I do!"

"Then name your price, and conduct me at once to where I can meet William Blake."

"Presently! The price is the thing first to be considered, before making a bargain, you know," Dick Drew said, with a sinister smile upon his blonde face.

CHAPTER IV.

A MYSTERIOUS POSTER.

THE next day Clifford called upon Moses Monk, a typical Jew in appearance and habits, but some there were who hinted that there was more of the Yankee about him than of the genuine Jew. If such was the case, one thing was certain—he was playing a well-studied part.

Moses Monk was a man of means—a banker, money-lender and pawnbroker combined.

He did a general banking business, in his little shanty, negotiated loans, and lent money on articles of personal value. His place was a regular curiosity, and to Lord Clifford's mind the fat individual presiding behind the counter, who was nearly as thick as he was long, was even as much of a curiosity as the miscellaneous articles he had collected around him.

He was some fifty years of age, with a face florid and double-chinned; black, wiry hair; piercing little black eyes, looking out from under ledge-like brows; a hook nose with a seed wart on the end, and a fierce black mustache.

He dressed well, however, despite his lack of beauty in face and figure, and there was an expression about his countenance which betokened that he was a shrewd one to deal with.

"Goot-morning, mine frient!" he saluted, bringing a pair of glasses before his eyes, as the gentleman entered. "Ish der somet'ings vot I can do for you, dis morning?"

"Yes, I trust there is," Clifford replied, approaching the counter. "I am short of means and wish to draw some money either on my foreign or American letter of credit—say ten thousand dollars. My American letter is from the Bank of North America, New York."

"A very goot pank, sure it vas, poot I have not so mooch monish to my name!" Moses responded, promptly. "You write me an order for der amount, und I git you five t'ousand now und der balance ven I draw on New York."

"That will not answer my purpose. Can you cash a thousand?"

"Yaw! I giff you eight hundred for von t'ousand dollar order, mine frient."

"What? Is that the kind of a premium you bankers exact?"

"Dot ish shust id. Ve don'd vas keep open shop for noddinks. Ve coome here to make monish."

"So I should infer. I don't know which is the least honest—the man who robs the stage, or the one who robs publicly, with the people's sanction. But, as I have got to have some money, I suppose I shall have to yield to you. this time."

And going to a side desk, the nobleman wrote out a check for one thousand dollars—the Jew, in the mean time, watching him like a hawk, as if there was something in his appearance that struck him, peculiarly.

"There! Give me the eight hundred dollars!" his lordship said, laying the check on the counter. "If you get many such customers, you will soon be an American Rothschild."

Monk looked at the check carefully, and then counted out the eight hundred, and laid it in Lord Clifford's hand.

"I vas effer so much opliged to you, mine frient," he said, smilingly, "und shall always pe gladt to do you de same kind of a favor hereafter. Goot-day, sir; come aroundt ven you vas proke."

"Perhaps I shall," Lord Clifford said, as he set out on his way to the hotel.

That afternoon, several posters were found stuck up, here and there, about the town. By what agency they came there was just what no one could explain, nor did the posters themselves afford any information.

This is how they read:

\$5,000 REWARD.

"Some years ago an English gentleman, Lord Clifford by name, came to Western America accompanied by his five-year-old daughter, for the sole pleasure of having a buffalo-hunt with the noted scout, Buffalo Bill. Finding that Cody's services were not to be had, for love or money, just then, his lordship stopped for several months with a herdsman and farmer, William Blake by name. Blake's child and the nobleman's child looked as near alike as two peas, and the latter's child being sickly, and the two little ones becoming very much attached to each other, his lordship made a bargain with Blake, by which the latter was to keep Clifford's daughter at the prairie ranch for two years, in order that she might regain her health from the pure air and free life of the prairie. For this service his lordship freed Blake's ranch from all indebtedness, and then departed for England.

"A little over two years afterward, he returned to America, and to the Blake homestead. Here he learned from the neighbors that there had recently been a fire which had consumed the house and out-building—that the bones of Mother Blake had been found in the ashes—that the scalp of a child had been picked up—that the hired girl and other child were missing—and last but not least, that Blake himself had arrived on the scene after the fire was over; had picked up the scalp—then uttering a terrible oath, had mounted his horse and ridden madly away, never to be seen again, in that section. Any one who can throw any further light on the matter, will be suitably rewarded. To any one who can reveal the whereabouts of Bill Blake and the other child, a reward of \$5,000 will be paid. All communications should be sent to

X. Y. Z.

"Post Office, McGuffin's."

The next consideration to be considered was—who was X. Y. Z.?

To the best knowledge of the citizens, no such a man lived in McGuffin's.

It was evidently a fictitious signature, to disguise the identity of the author.

A good many curious ones paused to read the notice, Lord Clifford among the rest.

"Humph!" he said, musingly. "this is strange. I wonder what it means. Evidently some one wants to find my lost child worse than I do. Who it can be, in this wild country, is more than I can guess."

It was a matter that puzzled him exceedingly, and gave him not a little uneasiness. The idea that some one was working in ahead of him, on his own game, naturally gave rise to the supposition that it was for no good purpose.

Dick Drew came up as his lordship was reading the notice for the second time.

"Ha! ha! I see you have been trying to gain your point by another way than by patronizing me," he said, with a half-sneer. "All right; just as you please about it."

"You are mistaken," Clifford said. "I know no more who posted this notice than you do—perhaps not as well. Evidently some one has a scheme on foot to make money out of me."

"So it looks, and it now stands you in to engage me to thwart this plotter, by first introducing you to Bill Blake."

"I am not so sure about that; still, you may be right. You swear you can put me face to face with this man Blake, to whom I intrusted the welfare of my child?"

"I do."

"And your price is five thousand dollars?"

"Oh, no—not at present. The way things stand now you can well afford to pay ten thousand."

Lord Clifford put up his hands in astonishment.

"Are you crazy, man? Do you take me for a person you can twist around to suit your fancy? You are greatly mistaken, then."

"All right. I shall not urge you, but I dare say you will find after awhile that my services won't come in bad. Good-day."

And with a mocking bow he turned on his heel and strode away.

"That man is an infernal rascal, and thinks he has got a hold upon me; but that remains to be seen. Perhaps I may turn a trump myself."

Every mining town of any size has its dance-house. McGuffin's was no exception to the rule. Madame Moree's "Fashionable Dancing Academy" held open nightly, and was usually well patronized, for, with the exception of an occasional drunken fight, it was invariably run on a respectable plan, and patronized by the miners, their wives and daughters.

The madame herself was a remarkably handsome Frenchwoman, of business tact and a respectable reputation, and she allowed no one to run her place but herself.

It was a long, one-story shanty, one-third of which was used for a bar-room, and the remainder as a ball-room, with a side entrance to the latter for the ladies' use.

The music was generally furnished by a super-

annuated old miner known as Fiddler Jim, assisted by the madame on the piano.

The evening of the day when Lord Clifford had seen the posters offering the five thousand dollars reward, he was sitting in the office of the hotel when a letter was handed him.

In some surprise he noted the fact that it was directed in a woman's graceful chirography, and without knowing what to expect, he tore it open.

What he read gave him no greater surprise than what he had expected.

The letter read as follows:

"McGuffin's, May —, 18—.

"Lord Clifford and Lady:—

"Learning of your arrival in town, and in honor of your coming, the miners of McGuffin's, their wives and daughters, wish to show their due respect to your lordship by giving a grand ball at my fashionable dancing academy, and I have been chosen to beg the honor of the presence of yourself and her ladyship this evening. Very sincerely,

"MADAME MOREE."

Of course Lord Clifford smiled to himself at the absurdity of the thing.

"I hardly fancy Lady Theresa would care to make herself the reigning belle of so fashionable an affair, but in order to make myself familiar with these rude people, I will attend to-night, and see what kind of a skirmish is to be given to our honor."

Accordingly, when it was about nine o'clock, he repaired to the dancing academy, in evening dress, and looking every inch the nobleman he was.

The music and dancing immediately ceased as Lord Clifford entered, and Madame Moree glided forward to meet him.

"I am so delighted that you have come, my lord. I am proud to meet so eminent a stranger here in my humble surroundings."

"I am glad that my coming can give you pleasure, madame. It is very seldom I go out to social gatherings, but I thought I'd have to make a break for once, and humor yourself and the townspeople."

"It was so considerate in you. But, where is her ladyship?"

"Too indisposed to come out this evening."

"Too bad," madame said, with one of her charming French smiles. "But that need not deter you from enjoying yourself, my lord. With your permission, I will introduce you."

And, taking his arm, she took him about the ball-room and introduced him to the ladies and gentlemen present, and the first his lordship knew, he was whirling away with a robust and by no means homely mountain lassie, whom he found to be quite as good a waltzer as himself.

From her he was caught up by another, and another, until things began to look as if he were hopelessly in for a night of it, without rest.

About midnight there was an intermission for refreshments, and the Englishman was thanking his stars that he would perhaps now get a chance to slip away to his hotel, when something occurred that put an end to any such hope.

A young woman, apparently of seventeen or eighteen years of age, clad throughout in male attire, of rich and stylish gray, and with a

slouch hat bent up on the left side, sauntered into the room, twirling a jaunty cane between her fingers.

"Hello! Is this the shebang?" she cried, so all present could hear her. "Waal, now, this is gorgeous, ain't it? Where's his nibs, the lord? I'm Rowdy Kate, right down from Right Bower Camp, an' hearin' thar was a genuine lord here, I kim over fer ther honor of havin' a dance with his lordship, you bet! So, ef you know what's the cute caper, jest trot out yer lord!"

And with this order, the extraordinary girl folded her arms and gazed coolly around the room.

CHAPTER V.

ROWDY KATE AND HER STRANGE PARD.

AND there was no mistaking that this self-same Rowdy Kate meant pretty nearly what she said, for she was an independent and resolute-appearing personage, and moreover, a brace of revolvers in the belt about her waist seemed to indicate that she was not one to argue long over a disputed question.

Of fine figure, of medium stature, she was a remarkably pretty girl, despite her unnatural habiliments. Her face was one of almost marvelous beauty, lit up by a brilliant pair of eyes. Yet there was an expression about her fair face which suggested the possibility of bitter experience which possibly had contributed to deaden the natural modesty of her sex.

Following her unceremonious entrance into the ball-room, there was a dead silence, for several moments, after she had ceased speaking.

"Come! I say trot out yer lord, duke, or whatever he may be!" she again cried, growing impatient. "I didn't sail down hyar ter kick up no muss, I allow, but dance wi' the Johnny-Bull-dog aire I, ef it costs my biggest bag o' dust, you bet!"

At this juncture, the madame, who had the standing reputation of being able to run her own shanty, came forward.

"See here, young woman, your presence is objectionable and you must leave!" she cried, authoritatively, taking Kate by the shoulder.

But, that dashing personage shook her off.

"Who are you, that you presume to lay your claws on me?" she demanded, her eyes flashing.

"I am Madame Moree, the proprietress of this place!" was the austere response, "and you not being dressed in accordance with the customs of my place, and being, quite evidently, a character with whom my patrons do not care to associate, I must politely request you to take your leave, at once."

"Waal, now you don't say so?"

"Most certainly I do!"

"And ye ain't a-goin' to let me dance with his lordship?"

"No! the idea is absurd."

"Mebbe ye think he's better nor Rowdy Kate, old powder-face?"

"That matters not," the madame replied, fiercely, firing up at the insult. "Either you leave my establishment at once, or I will have you thrown out."

"Phew! that's consoling. Now, just you lookee here, my frisky maiden—I didn't come

here to hev no fuss with you. I simply want the pleasure of dancing with his lordship, an' then I'll skip. My name is Rowdy Kate, because I'm a leetle wild, but ef ther ain't more orthodox honor an' lady in my little finger than ther is in yer hull figgar, I'll buy ther clams fer the crowd. I'm no slouch, ef I am rough, as ye'll find ef ye don't humor me, thar'll be music!"

"Pipo!" madame called, shrilly.

"Pipo!" Rowdy Kate called, mockingly.

The next instant, the repulsive-looking hump-back came bounding into the room, and stood awaiting the madame's orders.

He was a hideous looking human, with big eyes, and teeth from either jaw protruding through between his lips—in appearance more like a wild beast than like a man.

"Ha! ha! ha!" Rowdy Kate cried merrily, as her gaze rested upon the nondescript. "So *that's* your bouncer, is it, Madame Fresh-skin? I say, Johnnie, just you look me over—I'm Rowdy Kate, I am, an' you're only about half of a bite for me; so you'd better go back and spill bug-juice."

"Pipo!" the madame cried, stamping her foot, in a passion. "Do you see that woman?"

The dwarf nodded with a grin.

"Well, throw her out at once."

"Yes, come on, and throw me out, gorilla—Pipo!" Kate cried, composedly, folding her arms, and looking him unflinchingly in the eye.

The dwarf showed his terrible teeth as a wild beast might have done, gave vent to a guttural growl, and bounded forward.

Just within arm's reach of Rowdy Kate did he get, when her right arm flew out! There was a concussion, as if bone had met bone; then the "bouncer" tumbled to the floor in a heap.

Something like a murmur of approval went up from the assemblage, while Rowdy Kate waved her hand triumphantly at the madame.

"There you are, done up in a nut-shell. *That's* the style we sling on, up at Right Bower, without paint, or powder!" she cried, laughingly. "What say?—can I dance with his lordship, now?"

"No! no! no!" madame fairly shrieked, working herself into a fury. "I will kill you! I will kill you!"

And with the words she drew a glittering dagger from the folds of her dress, and glided toward the girl sport.

What would have occurred next is hard to say, had not a man—a stranger at that—bounded into the room, caught the would-be murderess by the hand, and hurled her back.

"Stop!" he cried, in her ear.

She gazed at him a moment, in speechless rage; then an expression of astonishment and horror came over her face; she hid it behind her hands, and staggered from the room.

The man who had wrought this sudden change was one of rather striking appearance. He was just tall enough to be of commanding presence, with a thoroughly-developed and handsome figure, clad from his top-boots to the chin in elaborately-fringed, white-tanned buckskin. His face was clear-cut and firm, and by no means homely—his eyes were dark and pierc-

ing; a mouth of pleasant expression was shaded by a model mustache, curling upward at the ends; a narrow goatee ornamented his chin, and his wavy dark-brown hair fell gracefully over his broad shoulders from beneath a broad-brim slouch hat, pinned up on one side with a gold band.

He turned and gazed after the madame an instant, an expression of supreme contempt on his handsome face; then he turned his gaze over the assemblage placidly as he took out and lit a cigar.

Rowdy Kate came forward, her face glowing with enthusiasm.

"Bully for you, stranger!" she said, putting out her hand, which he took. "I see you're after my own style, an' I'm glad to see you. If it ain't any o' my business, what's yer inscription?"

"My name, you probably mean?"

"On course."

"Well, I believe I'm called John Smith, when I'm at home," was the composed reply.

"Ha! ha! So you belong to that everlasting Smith family, do you? Some relation ter old John, I dare say, who reskued old Pokerbontas."

"Undoubtedly," the stranger said, dryly.

"Then you're a brick! Speet as how ye knowed the woman who passed when you ordered, hey?"

"Well, yes, I once met her, and I presume she recognized me, judging by appearances."

"Who sez she didn't? Why, she turned jest as white as a bleached piller-case and vamoosed like she didn't care about interviewin' you, or my name ain't Rowdy Kate!"

John Smith started a trifle.

"Rowdy Kate, eh?" he said, surveying her critically.

"Yas—that's my lay-out. Ever hear of such a party?"

He pointed to a trio of armed miners who were marching into the ball-room abreast—rough-looking fellows, too, they were.

"Bet a buckshot they're coming for me!" Kate said, her eyes flashing. "The amiable madame has set them on."

"Perhaps they're not after you," the stranger remarked, reaching down and drawing a pair of cocked revolvers from his bootlegs. "It is quite possible they will not get the gent they are looking after."

The miners advanced to within a few paces of where Smith and Rowdy Kate were standing, and halted; the dancers filled out the background of the somewhat interesting scene.

"Well, gentlemen, what do you want?" Smith demanded—as he brought his weapons up in a position for emergency.

"We want to know if you are one William Blake, and if so we are here to arrest you!" one of the miners replied promptly.

"I may or may not be one William Blake, or two or three of them. My name, as I just gave it to Miss Rowdy Kate here, is John Smith, of Idaho City, Idaho. You are evidently off your groove."

The men turned to each other and muttered several words in an inaudible tone, then retreated from the ball-room as if yet dissatisfied.

"You had best get out of here, and avoid trouble," Smith then said to Kate, "for it behooves me to skip."

And with the words, he bounded away through the ladies' entrance, and was gone.

"Stop him! stop him!" Lord Clifford cried, springing forward. "That man is indeed William Blake, and I'll personally give five hundred dollars for his capture!"

He had realized when Smith made a break for escape, that the handsome stranger indeed bore a close resemblance to William Blake—a fact, luckily for the stranger, which had not particularly impressed him, when the miners had made the charge.

But, when a dozen men, bent on securing the reward, rushed out into the night, they had only to learn that stalwart John Smith of Idaho City, was not to be found.

And during the excitement, Rowdy Kate took leave of Madame Moree's "academy."

The fact that a certain personage named William Blake, had been in McGuffin's during the night, was the cause of considerable commotion the next day.

Not particularly from the fact that such a person existed, but because it was generally known that at least two persons in the town were anxious for his capture—Lord Clifford for one, and the reward offerer, X. Y. Z., for the other.

Who the latter personage was, no one seemed to have any idea—therefore, Lord Clifford was looked upon as the prime loser by Blake's escape.

Anxious to ferret out the matter, Lord Clifford sought the three men who had appeared in the ball-room, and demanded to know who set them on to the stranger.

At first they seemed loth to divulge the secret, but when a consideration of money was slipped into their hands, they of one accord said the madame had told them what to say.

With this knowledge gained, his lordship took his leave.

"This madame is a Frenchwoman, and consequently a schemer, and undoubtedly a very devil by nature," he muttered. "Frenchwomen, as a rule, run that way. Now, the next point, to consider is—what connection with or interest in me or my affairs has she, and how much does she know, and where did she learn it? Egad! the situation seems to grow more intricate, and complicated. Yet I can but believe that I am on the right way to the finding of the surviving child, be it Blake's or mine."

He immediately sought the hotel, but instead of going to his own apartment, rapped on the door of the madame's room, for she, too, was a boarder in the house.

It was immediately opened by the madame herself, and looking quite pretty, she was, in a full and elegant toilet, notable for its costliness.

"Ah! is it you, most noble Lord Clifford?" she said, with a sweet smile. "I half expected you might honor me with a call, taking into consideration that I come from a family of noble blood. Will you come in, my lord?"

"With your kind permission I will, madame, as I have a few questions to ask you."

They were soon seated, the madame throwing all her power of fascination into her smiling eyes.

"I am all attention, my lord. Anything I can tell you, I will be pleased in doing."

"Thank you. I will not question you long. What do you know of myself and my affairs?"

"Nothing, my lord—absolutely nothing; or nothing more than what gossip has brought to my hearing."

"Then, what do you know concerning William Blake?"

"I know that we are enemies, for life. Why or wherefore, it cannot possibly matter to you."

"You are sure of this?"

"Quite positive."

"Why did you seek, then, to have him arrested?"

"Because, I saw and recognized him last night, for the first time since—well, in several years. I feared yet hated him. I thought of the reward as a medium of revenge; you know the rest."

"Do you know Rowdy Kate?"

"No—nor do I care to. She is only a strolling vagabond, not worthy of notice!"

"I doubt that," was his lordship's unuttered thought.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DREWS' PLOT.

SEVERAL days passed without anything of story importance happening. The excitement had gradually subsided, yet Lord Clifford had caused to be posted a notice and reward similar to that which had been issued by X. Y. Z., only that he had doubled the latter's offer, by placing the figures for the capture of Blake at ten thousand dollars.

Such a sum in eastern cities would naturally create a sensation; but out in the mines, where money was to be had for the digging or playing, such a reward was not regarded as extraordinary, and none of the sharps of the town appeared to be eager for the bait, and Lord Clifford began to despair, nearly as much as Lady Theresa.

"You will never succeed, my lord," she persisted, "and I long to be back at Clifford Cliff, once more. You have heard and seen enough. I should think, to discourage you. The scalp of one of the children being found, that conclusively proves it was murdered at the farm-house. Do you for a moment suppose that Blake would kill his own child and make off with yours?"

"Not unless, like the arrant knave I believe him to be, he may have designs as regards bringing about an heir to my estates in the future. No! no! I shall never set foot on English soil again, until I have stood face to face and at sword's points with the man who betrayed the trust I placed in him. It may take months or years before I can confront this villain, but sooner or later, he must explain to me that which I wish to know."

The next day he met Rowdy Kate, it being the first time he had seen her since the ball-room episode.

She was perched on a stump, overlooking the

river, engaged in the occupation of whittling and whistling, her rifle handy at her side.

Lord Clifford came upon her unexpectedly, but ever self-possessed, would have turned away, had she not hailed him.

"Hello, Lord Clifford! W'at's yer hurry?" she hailed, pleasantly. "Needn't git skeart, 'ca'se I ain't no grizzly, ner even a wildcat!"

"Probably not, but I did not mean to intrude; came upon you rather accidentally."

"Oh! that's all right. S'pose ye remember me. I was over tew Moree's shindig the other night, a-tryin' to get a dance wi' you, but somehow I didn't succeed. Guess as how they reckoned that was a high-toned skewrup, but pooh! I've known Digger Injuns to hev a more fashionable dance than *that* was."

Lord Clifford smiled.

"Yes, I remember you," he returned. "You are evidently possessed of a spirit of your own, and do not hesitate to show it."

"Me? Oh! no. I hain't got the spirit of a converted mouse, 'cept once in a while; then I'm a reg'ler old double-distilled typhoon, you bet."

"A suitable amount of temper is better than no temper at all. Are you alone in the world, young lady?"

"Don't call me that; call me simply Rowdy Kate. Yas, I'm a lone heart out of the pack, an' the knaves 'll soon pass me in, and finish the game with the use of spades—if indeed any one takes compassion enough on me to put me out o' the reach o' the wolves."

"You are evidently in a melancholy mood, to-day."

"You mistake. I allow this is one of my bully days. Ef ye want to see me blue, I'll come and tell ye, some day."

"Have you no friends or relatives living?"

"One or two relatives, but no friends—not a reliable, true, never-failing friend on the face of God's footstool."

"That is bad. I should think it would be easy to find friends for one as bright and beautiful as you."

"Humph! the word friends ain't no good nowadays. I kin go up the street and pick up a dozen professed friends, but I'd quicker trust myself in the hands of the fiercest mountain-robber, because there is honor among them, where their proclaimed betters are no more or less than snakes in the grass. As fer the wimmen, they're wuss'n the men. Because I don't incumber myself wi' twenty or thirty yards o' caliker or silk, or satin, they call me bad, bold, and the blazes knows what all. Let 'em call! Rowdy Kate's all right, ef she aire leetle, an' she don't care a fig fer no one 'cept her dorg. Here, Grizzly—come, Grizzly!" and she puckered up her pretty mouth, and whistled merrily.

In response an animal made its appearance, and came bounding toward her—not as dogs usually bound, but turning veritable revolutions over and over from fore feet to hind, in the same way our circus performers turn successive hand-springs. It was a most remarkable sight for a dumb brute to be seen doing, and when he arrived in front of his mistress and stood upon his hind-feet with a triumphant wag of his

tail, Lord Clifford clapped his hands heartily in applause.

"Thar, *thet's* my friend, an' about the only one I kin lay any claim to, I tell ye. Thet poodle ain't no great scraps on beauty, but he's a fighter, an' knows more'n lots o' humans I've seen."

"Undoubtedly, judging by his recent exhibition."

"Oh! I l'arnt him that. Sum' fellers hate dorgs an' shute 'em on sight. As a rule they ginerally take aim at a dorg's head—so I l'arnt Grizzly allus ter approach a pusson promiscussly, so that ef he war fired upon, they war as likely to shute off his tail as his head."

"Your logic is not without reason," Lord Clifford said, smiling. "And now, may I ask you how much do you know about the man who rescued you the other night, who called himself John Smith?"

"Ha! ha! I know one thing: he's too rich for you and the madame's blood. He's like a magic flea—when ye think ye've got him, he ain't there."

"I'll admit he was too much for us, then. But, I must capture him, or at least confront him and have redress."

"Yas, you'll need on several dresses ef ye calculate to buck ag'in' him. Don't know any more about him than you do, but I sized him up as somethin' nigh to a condensed earthquake."

"Bad man I have no doubt he is, but I must by all means have an interview with him. You are a girl of ready wit and tact—I'll give you the reward I've offered, if you will bring it about so that I can have a private meeting with him."

"Lord Clifford, you are undoubtedly a man of noble, generous, and honorable principles, but if so I know you will not a second time attempt to cause me to betray the only man who has taken my part in many a long day. I will bid you good-day, sir!"

Honorable Darcy Drew was one of the richest miners in McGuffin's, from the fact that he owned interests in several of the best paying mines, besides having lots of ready money, which he was at all times willing to loan for a big share, on unincumbered claims.

He was seldom seen outside of the door of his own mansion, which, by the way, was one of the best structures in the camp, and comfortably furnished.

All this outside business was attended to by his dutiful son Dick, who, with an eye to the future, was careful not to offend his father by any neglect of duty or extraordinary robbery.

What reason the elder Drew had for his persistent seclusion, was a riddle unsolvable to the McGuffinites, unless he was afraid of meeting some old enemy, who would "nail him" at sight. He was never seen upon the street, except it was after dark, and seldom, then.

The evening after Lord Clifford's interview with Rowdy Kate, Darcy Drew sat in his private office, or library, his head resting on his hand, the arm of which in turn rested upon a fine office table. That he was buried in thought was evident, for his green-goggled eyes rested steadfastly upon the blaze of his office lamp, for some time.

At last, however, a dark, exultant smile passed over his face and he looked up.

He was a dark, swarthy-skinned man of fifty, perhaps, of large, bony figure, and evident great physical strength.

His face was for the most part covered with bristling black beard, and his hair was of the same color. These facts, with his gaunt, long face, gave him anything but a prepossessing appearance. What was the color of his eyes was hard to determine, without removing his goggles.

His attire was of a respectable nature, but not loud or flashy.

"Yes, that is the choice of many ways of getting at the matter, and I must tell Dick about it. It can be done, perhaps—"

"Yes, perhaps it can, dad," Dick Drew said, entering at this juncture—"it depending altogether on what the 'perhaps' refers to."

"That ye shall know directly, boy," the elder Drew said. "But, what is the news?"

"Nothing, in particular. Everything seems quiet, and very little is said about the rewards."

"Just as I surmised. This man Blake is too little known in these parts, for identification, and devilish few miners are willing to give up steady jobs for the sake of going on a wild-goose chase after him. I wish I could have seen the fellow; I should then be better satisfied that it was indeed the man."

"There can be little doubt of it, as the madame claims to have recognized him at sight, as did the Englishman."

"Strange that he should come here; but it will not be nearly so strange if he reappears. He is a crafty devil."

"Well, I don't imagine we have anything to fear from him, no matter how savage he may be."

"Ha! ha! no. And, now, about the child. There are evidently three parties who know something of the matter, and Lord Clifford, Blake, and another person constitute the three, forgetting, of course, ourselves, whose knowledge is very limited. Well, now, Lord Clifford, as I make out the case, is the most interested party, from the fact that he is searching for his lost offspring. Nor is this all; he is searching for an heir—one out of the only two living legal heirs who could inherit his wealth after his death. I have learned all about this. The only heir remaining, is the Lady Theresa, who accompanies him, and who only inherits, when it is proven that the true child of Lord Clifford is dead. See?"

Dick Drew nodded. He had a fertile imagination, and was not slow to comprehend.

"The second person to be interested in the case, I doubt not is Blake, for I have a stronger idea that he has not possession of either of the children, nor has he had, since the breaking up of his family. Therefore, it looks but reasonable that he has no more knowledge of his child than Clifford has of his, and if he has any fatherly instincts, he must be just as anxious to learn which of the two children was killed."

"You are right, again."

"The third interested party, has only a pecuniary interest, like ourselves, in putting on poultices and drawing out of the case all the money possible."

"Probably. And, now, if Blake is not possessed of the child, who is?—that's the question, which it may take a good deal of time to solve."

"Not in my estimation. I do not have a doubt but what the child who escaped the massacre at the farm-house, that night, is in the charge of the servant-girl, Mary Monk, who also escaped."

"Ah! that had never occurred to me, and I believe you are right. The next thing is—where is Mary Monk?"

"Not far from here, I fancy. This third interested party I spoke of, also possessed the name of Monk, and the name being an uncommon one, I presume he is related to Mary Monk, and has conceived an idea that such being a fact, he is interested in the circumstances of the case, by a knowledge of them and the whereabouts of Mary Monk and the child."

"Well! well! you'd make a fine rogue—rather a detective, if you wasn't so pious, and possessed of so many conscientious scruples," Dick Drew said, with a villainous laugh. "But this latter conclusion is only drawn from guesswork, eh?"

"Yes, but I have every confidence that it will turn out as I have outlined. Now, the things for us to do, is the next and most important consideration."

"Exactly. First of all, we must be to the fore in finding out where is Mary Monk and the kid?"

"Yes. That is nearly our first move. Then, at the same time, we must work Lady Theresa!"

"Ah!"

"Yes, she is next heir after the young 'un. She would not be natural if she did not have a hope that the child would never turn up. You see? Now, you can approach her on the subject and tell her you know just where to lay your hands on Lord Clifford's child, and are only awaiting for bigger inducements before producing it. In this way you can draw out her sentiments and make your inventory. If you think it safe, you can propose to her that if she will marry you, you will forever have the child kept in its present obscure but comfortable home. If she tumbles, all well; if not, you may in some such a way work up his lordship."

"Good plan. And now, how shall we proceed to work the Dutchman, Moses Monk?"

"I hardly know, as yet. It will not take me long, however, to arrange some good plan."

CHAPTER VII.

APOLLO BILL, THE ROAD-AGENT.

DURING the week following the events last narrated the name of Apollo Bill, the road-agent, became better known to the public, from the fact that several stages were relieved of their treasure-boxes and numerous passengers of their loose change and valuables.

Of course, Apollo Bill being first in the field in that section, he received the credit for these outrages, and his name was in every one's mouth.

Some said he was a very handsome man while others, who had encountered him, argued that little could be told whether he was hand-

some or not, owing to the nearly full mask he wore.

His band of scarlet coats were evidently fully as fearless as their leader and therefore were a formidable band to encounter.

Apprised of the existing evil, the U. S. Marshal had sent an expert detective to McGuffin's, who had the legal power to call for local assistance to hunt down the road-agents, if necessary; but as yet he had made no move in that direction.

This man's name was Butler, and instead of taking any immediate steps toward hunting down the outlaws, he issued a placard, offering five hundred dollars for the arrest of Apollo Bill.

As compared with the munificent reward offers by X. Y. Z. and Lord Clifford, for the arrest of William Blake, this reward enlisted no interest whatever.

Butler was a dapper little individual, who did not look as if he ever was intended for war.

In the mean time, Lord Clifford had accomplished nothing. He was still stopping at the hotel, and was daily on the alert, in hopes of learning something relating to his case; but it seemed to be a vain quest.

One afternoon, while he was out about town, Lady Theresa ordered her fine saddle-horse—a new purchase since coming to the camp—and mounting, rode about the town awhile, finally branching off into the deep ravine, which was the only way of reaching the camp by stage or saddle.

She had never penetrated the strange place before, and should have known better, perhaps; but the temptation to ride in between the cool, high, rugged walls was too great to resist, and the ring of her spirited steed's steel-shod hoofs reverberated through the long aisle of nature.

So well did she enjoy a wild gallop, and so much did she admire the grandeur of the rugged scenery around her, that she had gone many miles before she thought of turning back, and it was only then, when an accident occurred, that she was brought to a realization of her situation.

Selim, her horse, caught his right fore-foot in a crevice, and failing to extricate the foot, he went plunging forward to the ground with a scream of agony, as his leg snapped in twain.

Too thoroughly a horsewoman was Lady Theresa, to be endangered by such an accident. Many a wild and exciting fox-chase, in the great meadows back of Clifford Cliff had injured her to the habits and mishaps of equestrianism, so that she had landed upon her feet, safely, ere her poor steed reached the ground, bruised and badly broken.

"Poor Selim! I am to blame for this, my poor, faithful fellow! Your leg is broken, and I must be miles from the town. It is growing dark, too! Oh, dear, what shall I do?"

"Do what every sensible young lady would do, under the circumstances—be brave!" a voice exclaimed, and Dick Drew stepped from behind a big boulder, but a few feet away.

Lady Theresa gave a little scream of horror, but when she saw who it was, she felt a trifle more assured.

"Lady Theresa, this is a painful accident you

have met with, and it is opportune I happened to be so near, as I trust I can be of some little service to you, at least," young Drew said, approaching. "If you will go back down the gulch away, I will shoot this poor animal, who is suffering intense pain from a broken leg, and put him out of his misery."

"Oh! must he be killed, sir?"

"Certainly. It would be cruel to let him lay here and suffer, when nothing we can do can ease him."

"Then I will go, sir."

And she turned away.

"I will join you ere you have gone far, and act as your guardsman back to camp," Drew said, in his most pleasant and respectful tone.

And he was true to his word.

After putting poor Selim out of his misery with a rifle-ball, he hurried down the gulch in pursuit of Lady Theresa, and soon overtook her.

"We've a distance of over twelve miles to walk, Lady Tremaine, and I fear you will prove inadequate to the task!" he said, anxiously.

"Oh, never fear about me. I am young and strong, and if I get tired I'll rest, and then resume the journey. How came you so far, may I ask?"

"Oh, I've been hunting a big cinnamon bear for a couple of days past, unsuccessfully, and was about starting for home, when I heard you approaching."

They walked along in silence then for several miles, when Lady Theresa signified a desire to rest, and Drew found her a seat on a moss-knoll, while he stretched himself out upon the grass near by.

The full moon was pouring her effulgent rays down into the ravine, lighting up the picturesque surroundings brilliantly.

"His lordship has not heard any reliable tidings of his lost child as yet, has he?" Drew asked, as he lit a handsome pipe, and sent a wreath of smoke heavenward.

"Oh! dear, no, and the worst of it is he persists in remaining in this horrid country without any reason."

"Then you think the child will never be found?"

"Pooh! of course. It does not look reasonable that she will ever be found."

"You being the only heir, then, I should presume you have no great anxiety to have her found!" Drew remarked, insinuatingly.

Lady Theresa did not reply—her face was averted; she was toying with one of the diamond rings upon her fingers.

"I think I can read you," Drew pursued, carefully. "You are not a lady who could ever stoop to a criminal act or think a criminal thought—yet, should Maud Clifford never come to light, I am satisfied it would be but natural for you to feel a great sense of relief. Is this not so?"

"I neither admit nor deny it. I do not look for the child's recovery; consequently I do not feel the anxiety I might otherwise feel."

"But when I assure, truthfully and candidly, that I know where Lord Clifford's child is, and am only waiting for bigger offers from him before I produce her—what have you to say, then?"

"If what you say is true, I am of course in danger of having my hopes regarding the heritage spoiled. Where is this child?"

"In a pleasant but secluded home, where, ignorant of really who she is, she is as happy, as pure and as innocent as childhood can make her."

"You are sure of this?"

"I am. I saw her but a few weeks ago, and she was, to all appearances, healthful and happy."

"I must tell uncle this. It will give him so much comfort and assurance."

"Ah! then you think not of your own future?"

"Certainly I do, but not with designing intent."

"But, look. Hear me out, Lady Tremaine. I am a son of an honorable family, and should not, perhaps, make suggestions to one like you, were it not that I always hate to let a good chance go by unimproved. Now, this child is in good hands, in comfortable circumstances. She does not dream of being a nobleman's heir—why should she? Even the people who have adopted her have no thought of such a thing, and nobody but myself knows where and who she is. All the parties in the world might search for her without result. She is buried—none can resurrect her to her rightful position save me. Why, then, should you not be heir to all Lord Clifford's wealth?"

Lady Theresa buried her face in her hands, and burst into tears.

"Oh! don't! don't! You are a bold, wicked, unscrupulous monster—you wish to make me the victim of a villainous plot!"

"Ah! Lady Tremaine, you wrong me. I have no such purpose in view. I have simply been pointing out to you an opportunity to save yourself. I beg pardon if I have given offense. Come, let us go, or we will not get to camp before morning."

"Stop! there is more to this; you may as well explain now as later. You know where the child is—what would be the price for forever keeping the child in oblivion, as regards herself?"

"The price—well, there can be no harm in telling you. I am deeply in love with you, my proud and pretty Lady Tremaine, and, as your husband, I should probably look to our mutual interests in respect to the real heir. You may accordingly judge that my price is your hand!"

"Sir! I loathe and despise you for your willingness to defraud a child out of its just dues. If I want to marry a monkey, I will go to Africa and select one to my own choosing."

"Good decision! Darwin says all the human race are descendants therefrom, and perhaps your ladyship's tastes long for one of the original aborigines, rather than one of the more enlightened species. As to the child, if Lord Clifford don't care to pay a princely sum for it, I shall hold it a matter of twelve years yet, marry it, oust you out of Castle Clifford, and reign as lord-master. Ha! ha! no scheme like one reversible, to suit all circumstances. A kiss, now, my beautiful Lady Tremaine, and then I am away! Just one long, lingering smack—"

"In the mouth, and that settles you!" a stern voice cried, and Drew received a blow across his face that flattened him instantaneously to the ground.

He sprung to his feet, however, with a cry of fury, and stood face to face and within three paces of his assailant, who was a man of handsome figure, clad in scarlet suit of buckskin, top-boots and slouch hat—a man whose face was covered to the chin with a mask—whose hair flowed in a wavy mass over his shoulders—a man who wore a pair of dangerous-looking revolvers in his belt, and looked as if he could "lick his weight in wildcats."

"Curse you, what do you mean?" Dick Drew demanded, doubling up his fists and panting with rage. "What do you mean, sir, by laying hands on a gentleman?"

"Most assuredly, I do not remember of ever having done so, in anger!" the man of the mask replied, composedly. "Do you mean to insinuate that you are one of that species?"

"Certainly, and I can whip the man that says I ain't!" Drew declared, hotly.

"Oh! that probably is a matter simply of your own opinion. I dare say a good-sized mouse would frighten the wits out of you, if so be you happen to have any."

"You black-hearted ruffian, do you mean that insult?"

"I'm one of the most candid men in the world, so judge for yourself!" was the taunting reply. "Apollo Bill never thinks one thing, and speaks another."

"Apollo Bill!" Drew exclaimed, incredulously.

"Apollo Bill!" Lady Theresa gasped.

"Exactly! Apollo Bill!" was the cool response. "I seem to be known to you. Lady Tremaine, has this fellow, whoever he may be, insulted you further than by offering to kiss you?"

"No, sir—unless proposing to marry me can be regarded as insult."

"I should regard it as the height of insult. I wonder you didn't accept him! I should think the girls would run crazy over such a desirable young man. Young fellow, whence comest thou? If you peregrinated hitherward from the town of McGuffin's, it is yet several miles distant down this ravine, and about the healthiest thing you can do is to seek it, in a hurry. But, first of all, get down on your knees and say: 'Lady Tremaine, I humbly ask your pardon!' Then you can go!"

"Ha! ha! you think I am an idiot, do you?" Drew cried.

"I don't think anything about it!" Apollo Bill retorted. "All I ask of you, is to do as I just bade you!"

"Why, I'd see you in — first!"

"On your knees I say!" Bill cried, sternly, at the same time drawing, cocking, and leveling one of his revolvers. "I'll give you just two minutes to obey me."

Dick Drew was an arrant coward, when it came to facing danger; so he resolved to save his life, even at the expense of humiliation.

"Lady Tremaine, I humbly beg your pardon!" he said, a malicious smile on his face.

"That is wrong!" Apollo Bill said. "Get on

your knees. Lively, too—you've not much time to lose!"

White with rage, Drew obeyed; then, rising and shaking his fist at them, he hurried down the gulch.

"The hour is late," Apollo Bill said, turning to Lady Tremaine.

"Accompany me to my retreat, and I guarantee you greatest courtesy and attention, until morning, when I will send you back to McGuffin's. First, however, you must permit me to blindfold your eyes!"

CHAPTER VIII.

AT APOLLO BILL'S RANCH.

THERE was no other course Lady Theresa could pursue that she could see, and she accordingly signified her acceptance of the road-agent's proposition.

She could not be in worse hands, at any rate, than she would have been under Dick Drew's guidance, and this thought gave her considerable reassurance.

With a black silk handkerchief, Apollo Bill gently blindfolded her eyes so that she could not see; then he gave vent to a shrill whistle, and she was conscious that a number of horsemen had ridden out from some adjacent cover and surrounded them.

The next action was to place her on horseback behind Apollo Bill, who directed her to put her arms about his waist and "hang on."

The horses then started off on a gallop, and thus continued for hours, it seemed to Lady Theresa, ere a halt was made, and she was assisted to dismount.

Then, after a few minutes, the bandage was removed from her eyes, and she was able to view her surroundings.

She was in a large room, containing one door and no windows. Light was furnished by a dozen candles, which burned brightly in a rude sort of chandelier; a table, several stools, a couch of skins, and a carpet of the same material comprised the furniture.

The only occupant of the room, besides Lady Theresa was a neatly-clad Indian girl, who stood near at hand, and who had evidently removed the blindfold.

She was, more properly, a half-breed, being light of complexion, and more intelligent and pretty appearing than the average Indian girl.

"Ah!" Lady Theresa said, gazing about her, in surprise. "How is this—where am I?"

"You are in the house of Apollo Bill, the Trail Tornado!" the girl replied, in good English.

"But I thought I just dismounted?"

"So you did, and were lifted from your horse into this room," the girl said, with a vague smile.

"Oh! well, I suppose one is subject to being puzzled, under such circumstances as these. Where is Apollo Bill, as you call him?"

"Gone to the assembly room, I dare say. Did you wish to see him?"

"Oh, no. I have no overwhelming desire in that direction. Road-agents, or more correctly, robbers, are not on my list of acquaintances. This high-named Adonis who has brought me

here is, I dare say, a paragon of beauty and wolfish cruelty combined."

"Indeed, lady, you wrong him. Apollo Bill is a gentleman and a man of honor, outside of his profession, of which it is not for me to judge. He never offers harshness to a woman, but can be stern with men when necessity demands it."

"And who are you?"

"I am Conchito. I was rescued from the vengeance of my people by Apollo Bill when they were about to torture me for warning a party of pale-faces of an impending massacre. Apollo Bill took me to his home, treated me as he would a sister, and as such I love him."

"Indeed. Very romantic. Can you tell me what his name is, aside from Apollo Bill?"

"I cannot."

"You will not, you mean."

"No; I cannot."

"Ah! Do you know, then, what object he has in following the sinful life of a robber? Surely not wealth."

"Not that alone. He has a sad story connected with his life. Once he was in good circumstances, but the hand of an enemy did him a foul wrong—one that he could not forgive—one that urged him to seek for vengeance. He struck the trail of his enemy and followed him for many suns. At last one night he fancied he saw his man standing upon the upper deck of a Mississippi River steamboat as it lay at the levee. Drawing a revolver, he shot him through the heart."

"It afterward turned out that he had killed the wrong man, and the news of this nearly drove him wild with despair. From point to point he fled, closely pursued by the minions of the law. Twice he was captured and placed in jail, but on each occasion he escaped. At last, hunted down to the last resort, he rallied around him a band of fellows and took to the mountains. They were discovered in their first retreat and branded road-agents ere they had earned the right to such a calling."

"Assailed by despondency and anger, at this injustice, Apollo Bill fled to this fastness and organized his men into what is known as Apollo Bill's road-agents."

"There, you have all that I know about my protector."

"Good enough for a novel," Lady Theresa said, taking off her hat and riding-cloak. "I presume this muchly-wronged man has a child living, has he not?"

"Not to my knowledge, ma'am."

"You have never heard him speak of having a child now or in the past?"

"Never."

"Well, perhaps he is of a secretive disposition concerning his habits; perhaps, again, he is not the party I think he is. Have you ever seen him unmasked?"

"I have not."

"Then he remains constantly disguised?"

"So far as I know, yes."

"Do you think he would grant me an interview?"

"I do not—yet, I possibly may be wrong. I will tell him your wish, and you need not be surprised if he does or does not put in an appearance soon."

Then, with a courtesy, the girl passed from the room, taking the precaution to lock the door after her, and Lady Tremaine was left to her own meditations.

It was not for Lady Theresa to see Apollo Bill that night had she desired to ever so much.

She waited a reasonable length of time for him to come, and then threw herself wearily upon a couch of skins, wondering if she would indeed get safely to the mining-camp, as Apollo Bill had promised.

Sleep soon came to her eyes, and she forgot all her troubles, until she was aroused by Conchito, the Indian girl.

"Come. I must blindfold you, and then you will be taken back to the miners' camp," she said. "Here is a package Apollo Bill directed me to give you, saying it was what he had taken from you and Lord Clifford."

Lady Theresa received the package with a glad cry, and permitted Conchito to blind her eyes. Next, she was led from the room, and mounted upon a horse, with a man in front of her, the same as before, and was soon dashing away.

An hour later, she was dismounted in the gulch, within sight of McGuffin's but by the time she could unbind her eyes, her carrier was gone from view.

The following night, the outward bound stage from McGuffin's, containing bullion in the treasure-box, to the amount of ten thousand dollars, was stopped just outside of the camp, by a band of red-coated road-agents, the passengers relieved of their valuables, and the bullion appropriated, after which the outlaws rode triumphantly away, and the coach turned back to McGuffin's to dispense the tidings.

The excitement created by the report was intense. The owners of the bullion were wealthy mine-owners, but they seemed to feel the loss just as keenly as though they were poor, and offered big rewards.

A band of men were at once organized, and sent out to scour the vicinity for the bold marauders, but they returned the next day, at noon, without having even struck the trail of the gang.

Mining was for the most part suspended, and groups of men collected here and there, about the town, to discuss the situation.

What was to be done? They were in the midst of a danger for which there was no apparent help.

Were they to give tamely up to the system of brigandism, which Apollo Bill had inaugurated? Were they to submit to being deprived of their earnings by him, at his own convenience?

No! something must be done—all seconded that motion.

But what? That was the question just then lacking solution.

Deputy Marshal Butler was consulted, and asked why he did not make some move toward removing the existing evil.

"Gentlemen," he said, "from my experience of these road-agent devils, I find there ain't no way o' gettin' at 'em, like bidin' your time, watchin' carefully, an' 'ropin' 'em in, when they're not expectin' it."

This did not satisfy the average McGuffinite—he wanted gore, and wanted it bad, too.

But what set the town in the greatest uproar of all, was the discovery of a large notice just before sunset, posted upon a saloon-door, in plain view of every passer-by.

It was written with a brush in large letters, and read thus:

"NOTICE.

"I, the undersigned, will pay five hundred dollars to that party or parties, who will capture alive, and hand over to the proper authorities, one outlaw and road-agent by the title of Apollo Bill. He is a hard case, but must be caged, if any one's got assurance enough to try the job. As soon as captured, I will pay to the captor the above sum.

"Yours truly,

"APOLLO BILL,

"The Trail Tornado."

If this wasn't the height of impudence and audacity, the McGuffinites didn't want a cent.

After others had their turn at offering rewards, this Adonis of the roads had actually come out and offered a reward for his own capture—the worst of bluffs to the McGuffinites. Nothing like it had ever been heard of before in those districts.

The man Moses Monk seldom left his little bank, but early on the evening following the events last narrated, he closed the shutters, and left the place by the rear way, taking care to fast lock the doors behind him.

Going to a stable near by, he brought forth and bridled and saddled a skinny-looking donkey and mounted the same, after which he rode down along the shore of the river.

It was but a narrow and dangerous path, seldom used as a way of exit from the town for this reason, but the sober-looking donkey picked his way along as though familiar with the trail.

The donkey and its obese rider were so widely at contrast as regards size, that they made a really ludicrous appearance.

At first it was very dark, but after they had followed the dark, rapid stream for some three hours they were fortunate enough to have a dim light from the late moon to reward their efforts in endeavoring to pursue the difficult path.

The scenery for miles was wild in the extreme. On either side of the river rugged, craggy mountains rose almost perpendicularly, to great height, in continuous chains, as if to guard the sullen moaning waters from escaping from their embrace.

The night was well advanced ere Moses Monk came to a short of plateau widening in the monotonous course of the trail, and drawing rein, he dismounted.

The donkey immediately lay down, showing no disposition to proceed further.

With a grunt of approval, the banker gazed sharply around him, and then began to climb up a steep and rugged path, that led toward the mountain top.

For some time he pursued the route; then reached a sort of shelving ledge, barely big enough to stand upon.

In front of him, looking into the mountain, was a large, cavernous opening, which was the

entrance to some subterranean chamber, and which now had a dark and forbidding appearance.

Waiting a moment to get his breath, Monk stepped into the entrance, and called:

"Mary! Mary!"

There was no immediate answer, so he called again:

"Mary! are you there?"

Then, a woman's figure glided out from the cavern.

CHAPTER IX.

MOSES AND MARY.

"MARY, ish dot you?" Moses Monk asked, peering into the face of the woman.

"Who do you suppose it is?" was the rather short reply. "What brings you here at this unseemly hour, Moses?"

"Oh! dat you vill learn, ven you vas find oud," the Jew replied, facetiously. "Ish den kid ashleep?"

"Yes. What of it?"

"I vas glad of it. I haff something imbortant to tell you."

"What! Have you any tidings of—?"

"Dot don'd vas matter. I ish here to tell you somet'ink, if you ask me in."

"Oh! well, come along in; but for heaven's sake, leave off that Jew business and speech, which makes you unnatural and despicable!"

"Oh! well, if you like, I will, for the present, but I must resume it, in business, you know, for the average American admires the shrewd business tact of the Jew, if not the Jew himself, and therefore patronizes him. Lead on, however, and I will try to speak my native Yankee tongue."

Mary obeyed, and the banker followed her into the heart of a large inter-mountain chamber, where all was darkness of the most intense nature.

A lighted torch, however, soon illuminated the scene, and the interior of the cave.

There was for furniture a table and chairs, and some skins and blankets in a couple of places which were probably used for beds.

On one of these beds lay a flaxen-haired girl of nine or ten years, fast asleep—a pretty, sweet-faced, healthy-looking child, whom one could not help admiring.

Even Moses Monk went over, and looked down upon the sleeping innocent, with more of a softening expression than was usually seen upon his face.

Then he turned to Mary—a woman, young in years, and possessed of average good looks.

"She appears healthy and happy, Mary?" he said.

"And so she is," was the response. "Since I came here, she has picked up, day by day, the wildness of our surroundings seeming to affect her for the better. What brings you here, Cousin Moses?"

"Business. Sit down, and we will compare notes."

And so saying, he drew a stool forward into the torchlight and became seated.

Mary followed his example, a look of eager expectancy on her face.

She was a woman still in her twenties, and

rather prepossessing in appearance, despite her common dress and an habitual expression of sorrow which hovered about her eyes and mouth.

"You come to tell me good news?" she asked, leaning toward him.

"Well, that depends somewhat on how you look at it. I have news, it is true, but whether it will be good to you or not I do not know."

"Then you have found Mr. Blake?"

"Yes—that is, he was in McGuffin's not many evenings ago; but, owing to a demand for him, by several parties, he was obliged to make himself scarce. A new road-agent luminary has put in an appearance in the neighborhood, styling himself Apollo Bill, and as their descriptions are very nearly the same, I dare to presume that he and Blake are one and the same."

"Oh! Mr. Bill would never do that—no, I do not believe he would, for an instant, consider such a thing."

"Pooh! Men will do anything, nowadays, for the sake of roping in the shekels."

"Oh! I wish I could be satisfied, for certain, in regard to the matter. Who were the persons who wanted him?"

"The woman, Madame Moree, who keeps the dance house; Lord Clifford for another—well, there seems to have sprung up a general interest connected with him. You see it has got out about the lost child, and Lord Clifford is offering some big rewards for the capture of Blake or the child. That makes it worth while for different ones to try and ferret out the case. As it stands, I have got the inside track, and all I lack is your co-assistance for me to make things work."

"How do you mean?"

"The same way I explained to you on a former visit. Tell me whose child that is, yonder—Bill Blake's or Lord Clifford's. Then I will make you my wife, and our interests will be mutual and identical. Then I will produce the child before Lord Clifford, with you as the proof and claim a reward of twenty thousand dollars, which, when added to my own pile, will make us independent for life."

"A very tempting proposal that might seem to some women, but not to me. In the first place, I am your cousin—that is one good and sufficient reason why I could not marry you. In the next place, I do not nor have I ever loved but one man, and fate seems to will it I shall not be granted the favor of his presence very often."

"You mean Apollo Bill?"

"I mean William Blake."

"Pooh! you are foolish. That man you will probably never see again, for the Vigilance Committee are after him, hot and heavy, and 'll elevate him as soon as they get him. Besides, he cares nothing for you. When he was in McGuffin's he was accompanied by a woman dressed in male attire, who called herself Rowdy Kate, an' I reckon he was on purty good terms with her."

"Bah! I do not believe it!"

"Well, I do not know whether you do or not. But anyhow you must tell me which man is the father of this child. If you do not, we are henceforth strangers."

"So may it be, then. Until I see fit, I shall disclose nothing to any one."

"You are silly and stubborn!"

"I am not. You never thought well of me until you found I was worth money from having in my possession one of the children. I know all you care for me is to make some arrangements whereby you can get possession of the reward money and I will have nothing to do with you. Go back to your Jew shop and try to earn an honest living."

"Yes, I will go, but you may see me again soon in a way that will not suit you. Adieu, Lady Honesty!"

Then, with a bitter laugh, he turned and left the cavern.

Mary Monk gazed after him with flashing eyes.

"Oh! you contemptible coward, how I despise you!" she cried. "You thought to make your cousin your dupe and tool, but, no matter who is the parent of yonder sleeping child, you shall not have the satisfaction of earning the reward, nor any one else while I can help it. There are a few things I must learn before I yield my charge to any one, and, first of all—is William Blake true to a certain promise he made me some years ago?"

Moses Monk went at once back to McGuffin's.

He was literally boiling with rage over his defeat, and the soliloquized exclamations he made while *en route*, were more forcible than elegant.

He arrived at the mining-camp early the next forenoon and opened up his "shop," and while he attended to current business his mind was by no means idle.

When the duties of the day were over he went at once to the hotel, and to the room of Lord Clifford.

A maid answered his knock, and informed him that Lord Clifford was not in.

As she did not invite him to enter and await his return he went back to the "shop," and, throwing himself on a bunk behind the counter, was soon in the arms of Morpheus.

For hours he slept soundly, but was finally awakened by some one slapping him smartly upon the cheek.

Opening his eyes he beheld two men standing beside him, both of whom wore long beards, evidently false, and masks before their eyes.

True to a natural crafty instinct born in him, Moses Monk next turned his eyes upon their clothing and made a discovery.

Move he could not, because his hands and feet were securely bound with cords.

"Vel, vot you vant?" he demanded, surveying them with unflinching gaze. "Vot you mean py all dis foolishness mit me?"

"Waal, neow, I reckon we're hyar tew see ye on business, an' thort we couldn't find ye enny more at liberty than sum sech a time as this!" one of the men drawled out in an unnatural voice.

"Oh! shut oop!" Moses retorted. "Off you t'ink I vas a fool? I know you both, und id aind no use for you to dry on any monkey business mit your voices."

The two intruders exchanged glances, and uttered a grunt each of disapproval.

"Well, it don't make any difference if you do or if you don't," was the answer. "We're here on business, and have accomplished a part of it—that of securing some of your surplus cash. The remainder of the business is this: You know where Mary Monk is hiding with the lost child. Tell us where to find her or we will kill you ere we leave this place."

"But dot would be murder, und you don'd vas dare gommit murder!" Moses protested, greatly alarmed.

"Oh, we don't, eh? Do we look as if we are men to falter at the execution of any crime that would further our ends?"

"Vell, no; but id von't pay for you to kill me, because you got hanged, den."

"Oh, no fear about that. There's been more than one mysterious crime at McGuffin's that no one ever got hanged for, and you can rest assured you've not got enough friends to concern themselves about *your* demise. Besides, we are not known to be here. We mean business from the word, and so the quicker you tell us what we want to know, the quicker you ain't a dead man."

"I don'd vas know vere Mary Monk is at all!"

"You lie. It is known you left the town night before last, and there, of course, is where you went. It is useless to deny anything. I'll blow your brains out, quicker than you can say scat! One—two—three—"

"Hold on! I peg! I tell you! You follow up der drail up der river shore a number of miles, till you come to a plateau—den you climb up a steeb path, til you find von plack hole mit der rocks. Dot vas der entrance to von cave, und in dis cave you vil find Mary Monk."

"And the child?"

"And the child."

"Very good. Now, then, you will do us a favor by telling us whether that is Bill Blake's child or Lord Clifford's?"

"That I don'd vas can do."

"Why not?"

"Because I don'd vas know, mineself. I vent last night on purpose vor to find out, but Mary wouldn't tell me. If she had, I should haif got der reward from Lord Clifford to-day."

"Then it is a good thing we nailed you, to-night. You are too dangerous a customer to be at large, and must die. So say your prayers!"

"Dick Drew! Darcy Drew! You dare not kill me!"

"We shall see!" one of the masked men hissed, and his upraised hand came down swiftly.

Moses Monk uttered a groan and fell to the floor dead.

The two criminals speedily left the shanty by the rear, and hurried away through the darkness, for the late moon had not yet risen.

They had not gone far, when two figures appeared around the corner of the shanty, and paused near the rear door.

They were in person the figures of Rowdy Kate, and the dandy Celestial, Chin Chin.

"Sh!" the former said, in a whisper. "They've

gone, and that ain't all. They've killed the Jew, I reckon. You heard him groan, didn't you?"

"Chin Chin heere, allee samee likee Melican girl. Blood muchee git cold!"

"Humph! you're a chicken. Nevertheless, all thet I keer is so ye heerd. "Ye heerd, too, what ther Jew called ther galoots!"

"Of course—Chin Chin velly sharp ears."

"Well, then, listen. We'll keep this matter quiet for the present. Mind—not a word of it, to any one, until I get ready to spring the trap. Then, as sure's my name is Rowdy Kate, I'll bring those rascals to the doom they deserve."

"Allee rightee. Chin Chin do just what Melican girl slay. If Melican girl gittee any money, she dividee with Chineeman allee samee as if she was his wifee!"

"Oh, you bet!" Kate said, with a laugh.

The next morning the news of the murder of Moses Monk became known, and created more of a sensation than such a crime usually would make in the mining-camp.

A coroner's jury was at once impaneled, and brought in a verdict that he had been murdered with a sharp knife, by some person or persons unknown, and for reasons unknown.

A search was afterward made of his office, and it was discovered that all his money had been stolen, as well as a quantity of gold and diamonds he was known to possess.

Then some one mentioned that it looked very probable that, being as the money was gone, Apollo Bill the road-agent was the author of the crime.

A dozen stood ready, of course, to grasp at this theory, and in a short time it had become an established fact that Apollo Bill had, in reality, committed the crime.

That night, a queer looking specimen of humanity, mounted upon a queer looking specimen of a donkey, rode leisurely into the town, from out of the mountain-gulch route.

CHAPTER X.

'ZEKIEL STROP TO THE FRONT.

To begin with, his wardrobe was of the most dilapidated variety. His pants, coat and shirt were ragged and patched to such an extent that there was scarcely a semblance of the original cloth of the garments to be seen, and the colors of the patches embraced all the various hues of the rainbow.

His feet were incased in brogans of large size, and the battered wreck of a once stylish plug hat, which was plugged full of bullet-holes, was set upon the back part of his head.

In face he was a decidedly peculiar-looking person, nearly all of his physiognomy being covered with beard of a brick-red hue, matted and irregular in length, and his hair was of the same color and condition.

The mule he bestrode was one of the scrawniest of its race.

And this individual drew rein in front of Madame Moree's dance-house, from which strains of music were issuing, and gazed around him in apparent wonderment, as if it were next to impossible to credit the sense of his hearing.

"Waal, now, gol darn my knittin'!" he ex-

claimed, slapping his fiery, much-tamed steel upon the side. "I swow tew gracious ef thet 'ar ain't the fu'st fiddle I've hearn sence I left Podunk, N. H. I say, hellow, thar, fellers! be thet aire a fiddle I heer?"

"You bet yer boots, Yank!" one of the outside loungers replied, to whom the stranger had addressed his inquiry. "This is a dance-house. Won't ye come in?"

"Waal, neow, I don't keer ef I do, fer dancin' aire one o' my side-bolts, I tell ye. I swow to gracious ef I ain't bin to more corn-shuckin' dances, up around Podunk, than ye kin shake a stick at; an' the gals uster say I was some pun'-kins on the Fisherman's Hornpipe an' Money Musk, an' sech dances."

And with this remark the stranger stepped out of his saddle and stretched himself, to get rid of the kinks of his journey.

"Spect how a feller can git some one tew dance with ef he goes in thar, can't he?"

"Oh! yes, undoubtedly," Dick Drew said, he being one of the crowd. "The madame is a widow, an' I'll bet she'll freeze to you like hot cakes to the griddle. Come from the East, eh?"

"Waal, now, you're shoutin', stranger, you aire! I'm from Podunk, New Hampshire, I am, an' my name's Zeke Strop—old Obediah Strop's son, ye see. Mebbe ye know dad; he owns a saw-mill at Podunk, an' he's got ther best span o' oxen in the State; fer big pullin'. Waal, ye see one o' the Simpkins boys uster lend me yaller novels ter read, an' thru 'em I hearn tell so much consarnin' ther gold excitement out in this country, thet I told dad there warn't no sorter use o' talkin'—I wouldn't never skid anuther log till I'd see'd a few o' the sights 'twixt hum an' here. So I throw'd my leg over old Mazeppa heer, an' heer I am—dead broke. So ef any o' you chaps want to make a poor cuss happy, I'll take straight whisky fer mine."

"Why, of course. Whisky is as free as water here," Dick Drew exclaimed, foreseeing some sport ahead. "Walk right in, Mr. Strop and have something at my expense. How many barrels do you hold, friend 'Zekiel'?"

"Well, I'm generally gaged at forty gallons, but I allow I overrun about ten gallons," Zeke replied, with a grin.

He then followed Dick Drew and the others into the saloon, and Drew called forth the black bottle, directing the man from Podunk to help himself.

This Zeke proceeded to do, by unblushingly pouring out a brimming glass, and downing it with a smack of satisfaction.

"Well, now, gol darn my knittin' ef thet ain't like 'ile on troubled waters, tho' et ain't no whar as good liker as we git up in Podunk."

"Well, here comes the madame," Drew said. "I'll give you a good introduction, and no doubt she'll invite you to have a glass of champagne."

"Phew! neow that's good of you. I like tew get acquainted, furst rate."

At this juncture, the music having ceased, the madame appeared behind the bar.

"Madame Moree," Drew said, turning to Zeke, "allow me to make you acquainted with the Honorable Zeke Strop, ex-mayor of the city of Podunk, New Hampshire. Mr. Strop has come

here for a few days' recreation, and I recommended him to your academy as the place for terpsichorean pleasures."

In acknowledgment of which introduction Zeke bowed low.

"I am happy to meet you, Mr. Strop," Madame Moree assured, surveying him with a piercing glance. Will you have a glass of champagne, sir?"

"Waal, neow, you bet; that is ef you stand treat," Zeke promptly replied. "I'd like furst-rate to drink with you, 'ca'se how I'm darned ef ye ain't a reg'lar pictur' o' Deacon Tubbs's gal, Mary Jane, who I used to shine around Sunday nights till the deacon booted me out fer helpin' myself tew some o' ther wine he used fer feedin' the church folks wi'—an' he had a hull bar'l on it, tew. 'Spect how, maybe, ye may hearn tel o' Mary Jane?"

"Well, no—not that I am aware of," the madame answered, as she stepped into a closet, soon after reappearing with a bottle of champagne, which the dwarf opened. "Drink hearty, Mr. Strop; and then we will adjourn to the ball-room."

Zeke raised the glass with a gracious grin, and the sparkling beverage was gone in an instant from the glass.

Just whether Zeke had swallowed it or not probably none could have sworn.

The madame then showed Zeke into the ball-room and introduced him to a number of lively girls, and the man from Podunk was soon off in the midst of a hornpipe, making many grotesque figures that convulsed the spectators with laughter.

But this was not long to be. He soon complained of sleepiness, and went and took a seat in one corner.

In ten minutes, to all appearances, he was fast asleep.

The ball went on yet, for a couple of hours, when the people began to disperse to their homes.

There was an expression of satisfaction on the madame's face as she noted this, and her eagerness seemed to increase until the last person was gone, including the barkeeper.

Then she closed the shutters and locked herself within the establishment, turning down the lights, except in the ball-room, which had no windows.

When she had done this much, she stole toward the apparently unconscious Yankee who still slept in his chair in one corner of the room! Stealthy as the movements of a cat were those of the madame as she softly approached the stranger. There was a startling glitter in her dark eyes and an expression upon her face which boded tho Yankee no good.

Within a yard of him she succeeded in getting, and would have gone still closer, only that at this juncture the object of her approach suddenly sprang to his feet, with a cry that caused the treacherous Frenchwoman to leap back in alarm. At the same instant off came his hat, false hair and beard.

And the person whom this transformation revealed was none other than Bill Blake, whom we have seen once before, in the dance-house keeper's presence.

"Ah!" Madame Moree gasped, when he unmasked.

"Yes—ah!" he retorted, sternly. "You find I am still too sharp for you. My little sleight-of-hand trick fixed your drugged champagne down the outside of my throat, and no one was harmed. I presume we fully recognize each other, woman?"

"Very probable," the madame replied, white with alarm at being discovered. "One is not apt to forget a man of your standing. Oh! Bill! Bill!"

"Humph! what do you mean? How dare you address me familiarly, you bad, wicked woman?"

"I am not! Oh! Bill, are we never to be anything to one another again?"

"Never! Think you I could ever respect you? Years ago I married you, only to learn that your father and brothers were counterfeiters, and were using you even after you were my wife and the mother of my child, as an accomplice to their schemes—that you were robbing me of good money, and using me as a medium for circulating their spurious stuff, regardless of the peril it brought me into. I discovered your baseness and gave you an hour to get forever out of our home. Luckily for you, you were sensible enough to go."

"What else had I to do? But, since then, I have been a better woman, and I long to come back to you and your child."

"Yes, I have just had an example of your goodness to-night. It is a downright good woman who feeds an innocent greenhorn with drugged champagne. Oh! I don't doubt your goodness, at all. As to the child, madame, I probably have no need to tell you it is dead!"

"Dead! our little child dead?"

"To the world, yes. You have heard the story that one child was killed and one carried off. The saved child, if living, I have no doubt is Lord Clifford's."

"You do not know this?"

"No, not for certain, and it is likely that the truth about the matter never will be known."

"I do not think so. There are persons in this town who claim to know where the servant girl and the child are concealed."

"That is merely bluff. The reward would have an effect, if there was any truth in it. But, I am talking too freely with a woman I utterly despise. Mabel Moree, we are no longer aught to each other in this life; there are no ties whatever, so far as I am concerned, to draw us toward one another. It is possible that I may some day desire to marry again, and you, likewise."

"Never! I want no divorce, nor shall you ever marry any other woman!" madame cried.

"I will yet win you back, even though you resist with might and main!"

"Not if I know it. You and Bill Blake have parted for good, Maude Moree, and so let it be. Above all, keep yourself aloof from having anything to do with the schemes of two doomed rascals, in this town, or you will bring down upon your head the same fate that shall soon overtake them. Remember!"

The woman replied not. Her face was white with passion; she trembled in every limb.

"I have said all that is necessary at this interview!" Blake finally resumed, "and you will oblige me by opening this rear door, looking well that you make no attempt to have me arrested."

"You need not fear," the madame said, obeying his order. "I do not now seek to have you arrested, as that would only lose you to me. My object in life, henceforth, is so to get the best of you, that you will be only too glad to come back to me, an humbled and obedient husband. You are at liberty to go!"

A miser to the core, was Darcy Drew; he closely guarded his moneyed possessions, by night as well as by day. He slept upon a cot-bed in his office, at night in close proximity to an iron safe, which contained all the money that was not invested in landed property.

The night of the events last narrated, he did not rest well, but tossed uneasily upon his bed—wrestling with dreams and visions of an unpleasant nature, evidently.

It was in the small hours when he was suddenly startled from his sleep by a cough.

He instantly sat up in bed, with an oath, grasped a revolver from under his pillow, and cocked it.

The room was only dimly lighted by a ray of moonlight which streamed in through the window, but he was not long in discerning the figure of a man, standing near the door which opened into the hall.

"Ha! who the devil are you?" the mine-owner cried, leveling his weapon. "Speak quick, or I'll shoot!"

No answer.

The intruder, evidently, was not inclined to speak.

"Curse you, take that!" and Drew pulled the trigger.

There was no report!

"Take what?" the man cried, rapidly advancing. "Put up your tool, Darcy Drew, as you call yourself, and keep mum, or it will be the worse for you, because your weapon is not loaded, and mine is!"

"Curses on you!" gasped the speculator, shrinking back from the formidable six-shooter thrust toward him by a stalwart fellow clad in top boots, slouch hat and scarlet suit, and whose face was hidden behind a mask.

"Who are you, man?"

"Who am I?" was the grim reply—"who am I? Need you ask, Darcy Drew, *alias* Ben Boghart, *alias* Owl-Eye, the border ruffian—need you ask, when you hear my voice? I am your deadly foe—I am Apollo Bill the Road-Agent, and I am Bill Blake, the man-hunter. You are the man I've been hunting for years!"

CHAPTER XI.

APOLLO MAKES A LIFT.

"MERCY!" Drew gasped, as he heard the words of the masked intruder. "What do you want here, Bill Blake?"

"Not your life, this time, brute in the guise of man, although I have sworn to take it!" Apollo Bill said, calmly, as he seated himself

upon the office table, his weapon all in readiness for use. "I just dropped in to let you know I have found you, and that by no earthly flight can you ever again evade me. I see you're in somewhat better circumstances now than when you used to be known as Owl-Eye, the sheriff."

"Of course. I do not know what you mean, however."

"Bah! I know you perfectly well—God knows. Do you think I could ever forget you, when it was you, vile wretch, who fired my home, killed and burned my poor old mother, and tore the scalp from the head of one of my children? Curses ever rest upon you and yours, Ben Boghart, until the twelfth day of June!—then, look you out for my vengeance, for it shall surely smite you. Tell me, man—which child was it your fiendish cruelty murdered?—tell me, Ben Boghart!"

"How should I know, when I never saw enough of the devilish young 'uns to tell them apart? You may rest assured if I knew which was which, I—"

"Ha! I anticipate you. If you knew which was which, you would produce the remaining child and make some money out of it. No! no! you will never succeed in that game, my fine rascal. You'll find that Apollo Bill stands ready to balk you at every turn. Tell me, where is Mary Monk and the living child, for I am satisfied you know!"

"I do not know, nor would I tell you if I did. You thought Moses Monk knew, evidently, when you killed him, but found out different, it seems."

"What! dare you accuse me of that crime, committed, I've no doubt, by yourself? I say you do know the whereabouts of Mary Monk and the child, and I'll give you just ten minutes to tell me! If you refuse, either you open your safe there, and hand me over your hoarded cash, or I'll blow your brains out!"

"Were you to kill me a thousand times, 'ye could never make me disclose the hiding of the child, which shall never be yours. You hear me?"

"I am not deaf—you hear me, too! If you don't unlock and open that safe inside of five minutes, I'll put a chunk of lead into you instanter. So go ahead, without noise. Remember the time—five minutes!"

Drew gazed at the imperturbable individual confronting him—then at his safe.

He doubted not that Blake would do just as he had promised; he knew, of old, that it had ever been one of his characteristics to perform what he promised.

Once more he glanced at Apollo Bill, as he now stood grim and threatening—there was not an expression of pity or relaxation upon his face—nothing there but hatred and undying resolution.

"Come!" Blake spoke.

But a single word it was, yet it decided Darcy Drew.

Getting off the bed, he knelt before his safe and proceeded to unlock it. To aid him Apollo stepped beside him, and producing a dark-lantern, sprung the slide, thereby letting a bolt of bright light fall upon the safe door and Darcy Drew.

The latter soon had the door unlocked and swung open, and the interior of the safe was revealed.

"That looks business-like!" Apollo Bill said, dryly. "Now haul out everything, and count out your cash to me, so that I can see how much you have."

Drew obeyed.

He had gone so far—there was no use of his backing out now.

So he proceeded to count out his greenbacks and gold, until everything was included, and the result was:

Seventy thousand dollars.

"Humph! that is a strange coincidence!" Apollo Bill said. "Now that I remember it, that is the sum you robbed old uncle Jones of, down at Santa Fe, through misrepresentation in a rascally business transaction—on your part. I got to Santa Fe shortly after you left, heard of your big swindle, and told the old gent, who was in destitute circumstances, that if I ever ran across you, I'd make you pony over every cent, and send it back to him. And that is just what I shall do with this money. Hand it to me!"

Drew obeyed with an oath.

"You'll regret this, curse you!" he gritted, savagely. "You and I haven't squared accounts yet."

"Truly spoken!" Apollo Bill retorted, with a chuckle, "and until I get ready for you, June 12th, take that!"

And as he received the money with one hand, he dealt the ex-border ruffian a blow between the eyes with the other, that laid him out, senseless upon the floor.

Then, with a laugh, Apollo Bill leaped through a window he had left open on entering, and was gone!

As a matter of course, the next morning Darcy Drew had an interview with his adopted son Dick, and the events of the preceding night were narrated.

"We are ruined!" the elder Drew—as we shall still continue to call him—said. "The money that I gave him was all that is really ours in the world, for you are aware that Moses Monk held a mortgage for every cent my interest in the mines was worth. That mortgage is long overdue, and the succeeding heir will likely foreclose it, which will leave us penniless. Therefore, something must be done."

"The deuce, yes. Where will all my good clothes and spending-money come from?" Dick growled dubiously.

"To be sure. I doubt if you've got enough gumption to earn your own salt, if it wasn't for me."

"Thank you. We shall see. By the way, who is the heir to Moses Monk's property?"

"The girl Mary, no doubt. We failed to find any papers. The appointed executor, Mark Shelby, has likewise failed, and will hold the property a year before disposing of it."

"Well?"

"We must no longer put off capturing the girl, and see what we can do with her. If I am not mistaken, we can work her so as not only to

get possession of the kid—which means a reward of ten thousand dollars—but also the mortgages and other papers of Moses Monk. So much to be done, and then we are once more on our feet again."

"Indeed—if we succeed! That's the thing to consider. We've been having so devilish much bad luck of late that it looks as if we were on the wrong groove."

"Pooh! a little bad luck ought not to discourage us. I mean to realize out of the kid. Ten thousand dollars alone will give us quite a lift."

"How do you propose to reach the place where Mary Monk and the child are living?"

"By boat on the river. I would not go by the trail, lest they may have some one on guard to notify them of our approach."

"Very well. What will you do with them after getting them?"

"Take them to the wooded island just a mile below here. It will be a capital retreat for us all."

About as hot-headed an Englishman as ever existed was Lord Henry Clifford.

He was fathered by a stern and aristocratic old nobleman, who never forgave or forgot an injury. It was but natural then, that Lord Henry should inherit some of his father's qualities, among which was the one of not forgetting or forgiving an injury.

He considered that he had been done a terrible wrong, and his blood boiled for redress.

When he had visited the deserted farm some maliciously-disposed person had hinted to him that Blake had an object, and a prime one too, in burning his home and having his family massacred, as he had not long before had all their lives insured, from which he must, of course, have realized a handsome sum.

Of course this was utter nonsense and villainous meanness; but Lord Clifford accepted it, as he saw no one else to deny the story while in that neighborhood.

The man then whom he had aided and trusted was a wretch without parallel.

The day that included the events last narrated, he made up his mind to break the monotony, by going into the mountains for a hunt.

Lady Theresa entered the room, just as he was about to start.

"What! are you going out, my lord?" she asked, in surprise.

"Yes, I'm off for a little hunt. Mayhap I'll bring you back a grizzly cub, for a poodle."

"Mayhap, you will not return at all, my lord, for the road-agents are growing so bold, that everybody fears them."

"Well, I am not afraid. If, however, I should not return, why, I have left enough money in my bureau, here, to defray your expenses back to England."

"In that case, I suppose, the search for little Lady Maude would cease?"

"Very likely, yes, for you would not naturally care to interest yourself in a continuation of the search."

Lady Theresa colored—grew pale—then flushed, angrily:

"Thank you, Lord Clifford. As you say, it cannot avail me anything to hunt up an outlaw's child, and make her lady of Clifford's Cliff, when by right of entailment, everything comes to me, after the death of sweet little Maude whose sad fate occurred nearly two years ago. Good-day, sir!"

Then, with flashing, indignant eyes, she swept from the room with regal *hauteur*.

Lord Clifford turned and gazed after her with a prolonged whistle of surprise.

"Well, by Jove! That's the first time I ever saw an exhibition of my Lady Theresa's temper," he remarked, musingly. "I've been studying her some, however, since coming here, and have noticed a perceptible carelessness on her part, as to whether I ever succeed in finding Maude, or not. Something tells me some one has been talking to her—at any rate, she is right. If I die, now, she wins; but, I must not die!"

With his mind busied with these, and similar thoughts, he left the hotel, and wandered, on foot, into the mountains. In the beginning he followed the stage route through the gulch; but finally struck off up a path among the wooded peaks and crags.

For hours he rambled on, occasionally shooting a bird or rabbit, until the sun's position in the sky indicated that it was past noon.

Then, he was about to turn back, when he caught sight of a young bear upon a crag ahead of him, and likewise far above.

If shot, it would fall upon the rocks not far in front of him.

Raising his rifle, he fired.

Sure enough the animal tumbled off the ledge, but, instead of falling upon the rocks, disappeared from view.

Running ahead a number of rods, Lord Clifford came to the edge of a deep ravine, and saw the bear lying at the bottom—half a hundred feet below at least.

So sheer was the descent at the point where he was standing, that he had to search for a place less steep, ere he could go down.

He soon came to where a path descended through a thicket, and, following its course, came out into the gulch within sight of the bear.

To his astonishment, as he advanced he saw a man engaged in skinning the beast—a man clad in elaborate buckskin and slouch hat, but whose back was turned to Lord Clifford.

"Well, by Jove! that is cool! I wonder if he knows who killed that bear," his lordship growled, his anger rising. "I don't usually kill game for others to appropriate."

And, grasping his rifle, he strode toward the bear, quickly.

As he heard some one approaching, the man who was skinning the animal arose and faced about. Then he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

Lord Clifford duplicated it, and came to a standstill.

"Bill Blake!" he ejaculated, his features growing stern in their expression.

"Yes, my Lord Clifford, I am Bill Blake, at your service!" that individual replied, "better known Lereabouts, tho', as Apollo Bill!"

CHAPTER XII.

ROWDY KATE WINS AND LADY THERESA LOSES.

THE recognition was mutual.

For several minutes neither spoke; but at last Lord Clifford found voice:

"William Blake," he said, sternly—"William Blake, at last we face each other—the very thing I have been praying for the many days past since I discovered your treachery!"

"I am aware you sought to meet me, sir, and am sorry for it," Apollo Bill returned.

"Why sorry—because you hated to face me in all your guilt, William Blake?"

"What? Of what am I guilty? Tell me that!"

"Guilty? Why, you accursed villain, have you the face to ask me that? Guilty of what? Why, of hiring a dozen ruffians to burn your rosey home, wherein perished your aged mother and either your or my little child—the child I intrusted to your safe-keeping. Why, you are a monster!"

"Lord Clifford, you are an unmitigated liar!"

"Sir!" and his lordship's hand sought the side-pocket of his coat.

"I repeat it—you are a liar, sir! You have accused me of something no other man thought of doing—the murder of my own family. Before I deny such a thing, pray tell me what object could I have in killing those I loved?"

"Money, Sir Road-agent—*money*, a greed for which has led you to the position you now occupy. You insured the lives of all your family against death, and it was not your fault that the other child was not consumed, so that you could draw the insurance on its life!"

"And so you, a man of ordinary good sense and enlightenment, have the assurance to make a gross charge against me like this?"

"I have. You are a wretch and a rascal, and shall answer to me for the betrayal of the trust I imposed in you."

"And you, sir, whom I once believed to be a gentleman, are a liar and a coward, whom I would be very glad to accommodate with satisfaction. If your tongue had not run away with your wits, I could explain much since we have met. As it is, unless you apologize, we are henceforth enemies!"

"So be it, then. Far better to know a man of your stamp as an enemy than as a friend. As for apologizing to a man like you, or any man, in fact, it is wholly out of the question."

"Then I suppose we may as well fight it out here as anywhere. I presume you know how to handle a revolver, eh?"

"Probably! But I do not even intend to bandy words or fight a duel with you. I hereby kill you with less torture than you killed my child!"

And even while speaking there was a pistol report, though Lord Clifford did not take his pistol from his pocket, and Apollo Bill fell to the ground.

A faint streak of blood upon his forehead told where the bullet had glanced against the skull, and produced instant insensibility—for Apollo Bill did not stir after he fell.

"Ha! I thought the much-lauded scoundrel would some day find a man who would be too much for him!" Lord Clifford muttered, step-

ping nearer to the prostrate victim of his treachery. "He's paid the penalty of his crimes sooner than he had any thought of, curse him!"

But a quiver in the muscles of Apollo Bill's face, an instant later, undeceived him.

"No, he is not dead. The bullet did not kill, it only stunned him. But that matters not. I have a bitter wrong to avenge, and have sworn to avenge it, and there is no time like the present in which to do it. William Blake, if one shot will not kill you, another will!"

And with these words the vindictive man drew a revolver and pressed the muzzle of it against the temple of Apollo Bill, but before he could pull trigger he received a blow on the head with a club that felled him to the ground.

He was not deprived of his senses, however, and immediately struggled to his feet, to be confronted by no less a personage than Rowdy Kate!

"Hello! didn't expect me, did you?" she cried, her eyes flashing. "Well! well! Lord Clifford! I am truly ashamed of you. Not satisfied with having nearly killed this man, who never did you any wrong, you sought to finish your cowardly crime before he should awaken to take his own part. Why, cuss my boots! d'ye know what I've a mind to do?" and she whipped a revolver from her belt.

"I can surmise, but I know you won't do that. In so doing you would be wronging your friend here, who I know would prefer to settle with me personally."

"Well, et's lucky so. I know he'll make it hot fer you, or else I'd make your heart stop beatin' right here. An' now I'll givo you just about ten seconds to turn your pedals and stoot! D'ye hear?"

"As you have the advantage, I must submit to the inevitable," Clifford said. "But look out for me—we shall meet again!"

He turned away, and Kate watched him until he was out of sight, then followed him until she came in sight of him again, and saw that he was still traveling away toward McGuffin's.

Satisfied that he had no purpose of returning, she returned to where Apollo Bill still lay unconscious.

Searching about, she soon found water, and filling the cup at her belt she went back and bathed the road-agent's forehead and poured some water between his lips.

Then, by rubbing and chafing his hands, she soon had him restored to consciousness, and he sat up and gazed about him, for the moment bewildered.

"Ah! I see!" he exclaimed, feeling of his forehead. "The treacherous devil came near doing for me. Where is he? How came you here, Rowdy Kate?"

"Oh! I happened along, just in time to baffle him!" Kate grinned; then she proceeded to explain, Blake the while listening attentively, his handsome face growing sterner and his eyes gleaming.

"And he did that, eh?" he demanded, when Kate was through.

"You bet! an' I only let him off alive when he suggested that maybe you'd prefer to settle with him yourself. Oh! by blazes, you bet I'd

'a' paralyzed his heart-strings ef it hadn't bin for that."

"You are a good girl, Kate, and I respect you for your bravery. Moreover, I owe a great deal to you for saving my life!"

"No ye don't—not a cent, nor I ain't the tenth part of a good girl, an' you bet on it. All thar was of it, he was goin' to play the knave, when I stepped in with the ace of clubs an' turned a trump!"

"And won. Well, I shall always be grateful to you. You are alone in the world, Kate—there must be a history connected with your life. Will you tell it to me?"

"Mebbe some time. But not now. I must get back to McGuffin's to-night, where something may occur in which I am interested. So, if you feel recovered, I will leave you."

"Oh! yes; I'm all right now. If you must go, good-by, and I hope for further acquaintance in the near future, if so be you are willing."

After Lord Clifford's departure Lady Theresa went out, ostensibly for a stroll about the camp, but, in reality, in hopes of seeing Dick Drew.

Somehow of late she had been very nervous and ill at ease—by no means in the humor that had swayed her on coming to McGuffin's. The seeds planted in her mind by the oily tongue of Dick Drew had taken root, in spite of her heart struggles to do what was right.

Had he not told the truth, she argued?

If little Lady Maud was found she would, of course, be Lord Clifford's sole heir to an estate worth one hundred thousand pounds at the least. What, then, would be her—Lady Theresa's—fate!

Probably she would not be actually ousted from Castle Clifford, but she would not, naturally, have the same liberties, nor the same moneys, nor the same attention that she had so long enjoyed. There would be no more London season, in all probability, and many less admirers, when it came to be known that she was a dowless catch instead of a golden one.

The thought was gall and wormwood to her, the more she considered it, and all interest she had at first had in Lady Maud's recovery, gradually died out, and in its place grew the hope that she would never be found.

"Dick Drew told me he knew where the child was—that my hand, in marriage, to him, meant the reign of a lifetime for me, at Clifford's Cliff. If he speaks truly, why should I not accept him? He is not a bad-looking person, and seems to have both the education and the manners of a gentleman. If I could marry, and tolerate him, until I could find out the whereabouts of the child, and—and—well, dispose of her, then, I could perhaps, manage to get rid of my husband, and choose again, from rank and nobility. It is a desperate thing to do—I shall have cut loose from uncle and his support—the question is, will it pay?"

This was the question she had been agitating for several days.

She walked about for some time, finally going down to the river-bank, where she met Dick Drew, who was lounging there. He arose, respectfully, as he saw her approach, and stood gazing at her, curiously.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Drew," she greeted him, bowing. "Were you fishing?"

"Oh! no; I was merely passing away time, by watching the water. I suppose you have come down to sail for Africa have you not?"

She flushed, and then turned her vexation into a laugh.

"I appreciate your taunt, sir; I perhaps deserve it. Do you know that I have been seeking for you?"

"No, I was not aware of it."

"Well I have, and what do you think I am going to propose to you?"

"Well—I—I really can't say. That I go and commit suicide?"

"Oh! no; far from that. I have been considering the proposition you made me, the other night, and I've made up my mind to give you my hand in marriage!"

"Oh! you have?"

"Yes, on conditions that you can prove to me that you know the whereabouts of Lord Clifford's child."

"But, that I cannot do, without going miles and miles from here, and taking you with me. Therefore, all I have to offer you is my word of honor. To-morrow, unless before that time I make other arrangements, I shall start to fetch the child, and receive from its father, the sum of twenty thousand dollars."

"From Lord Clifford?" and Lady Theresa suddenly paled.

"Of course. We came to a bargain, this morning. You know twenty thousand dollars is a snug little sum of money?"

"Bah! It is but a trifle. You said if you did not make previous arrangements. Does that mean you are ready to marry me, and keep the child forever in seclusion?"

"It does. I am ready to carry out to the letter, the plan I first proposed to you."

"Then, come. Let us at once go before a magistrate, and be married, with the understanding that I am your wife, and you are to support me, until by the demise of Lord Clifford, we come into possession of his wealth."

"Certainly. There is an ordained minister working in one of our mines who will tie the knot in good shape, and after we are married, we can laugh at his lordship. It will be like losing a link in the golden chain of fortune, to him."

Dick Drew then took her to his father's house, where he left her, while he went to make all necessary preparations.

In a short time he returned with a rough-looking miner, who, equipped with a book, read to them the Episcopal marriage service, and inside of five minutes Dick Drew and Lady Theresa Tremaine were man and wife!

And, within an hour after that, nearly everyone in McGuffin's knew of it!

CHAPTER XIII.

A DOUBLE GAME OF VILLAINY.

LORD CLIFFORD heard of it on his return to McGuffin's, and, swelling with rage, he went at once to the Drew mansion.

Darcy Drew himself answered the summons.

"Is my niece here, in your house?" Lord Clifford demanded, savagely.

"Not that I am aware of, sir. Who are you?" the elder Drew asked, with a yawn.

"I am Lord Henry Clifford, and I hear reports that my niece has married your foster-son. I want to know if it is true!"

"Quite true, sir. They are married and gone. I know no more about it, sir," and with this by-no-means-comforting assurance, he slammed the door in Lord Clifford's face, leaving that individual in a turmoil of passion and uncertainty.

And that was all he could learn.

No one knew whether Dick Drew and his bride had left town or not. Some thought they had sloped, while others "poohed" at the idea.

Lord Clifford went to his hotel and deliberated.

"Let them go," he muttered. "For the sake of future inheritance, she has allied herself with a rascal who claims to know where my child is.

"If he does indeed know where she is, it is their purpose either to put her out of the way, or keep her for life in obscurity. But, we shall see. I may get possession of her yet, in spite of them, and then we shall see who will triumph!"

Later, that evening, he received a call from Madame Moree. She was elegantly attired, and looked really attractive.

"I have just heard the news of the fair Lady Theresa's great mistake, and want to tell you how much I sympathize with you," she said, as he handed her a chair.

"Then you think she *has* made a mistake, eh?" Lord Clifford asked, regarding her curiously.

"Oh! certainly, my lord. It was a great *mesalliance*. Young Drew is a fellow with no heart, feeling or principle, and no one likes him. He simply married your niece, hoping, should not your child be found, that he would realize handsomely from your wealth."

"So I am aware. Do you think he has possession of my child?"

"No, but he may have, within twenty-four hours."

"What makes you think so?"

"Because, he as good as admitted that he was going to get possession of the child, and wanted me to come to a certain place and take care of it."

"Ah! then there must be something in his assertion that he knew her whereabouts. Madame, could you be induced to tell me the place they wanted you to go to?"

"No," was the reply; "I could not do that."

"Then can you, still better, accept of the position they offered you and get possession of the child and surrender it to me? It will pay you well to do so."

"I will consider your proposition, Lord Clifford, and give you an answer at an early date. I will now bid you good-evening."

And she arose and took her leave.

"Methinks I foresee a little scheme cropping out, originated in the fertile brain of the madame. If she gets the child in her possession, she is the very woman to aspire to lofty position as a reward for yielding up her prize. Oh! God, why am I thus persecuted and plotted against, when I only seek my lost darling?"

That night when darkness reigned supreme

owing to the fact that the heavens were overcast with the clouds of an impending storm, the Drews, younger and elder, silently left their house, and made their way cautiously to the water's edge.

There were but few lights burning in the shanties, it being after ten o'clock, and the two night-hawks had little trouble in avoiding being seen.

At the water's edge, a skiff or small boat was beached. This was pushed off and entered. Darcy Drew taking the oars headed the boat up-stream.

"We'll get a drenchin', I'll bet!" Dick growled, keeping himself well enveloped in a rubber coat. "It's going to be a blamed rough night!"

"Just the thing for our business," the elder Drew grunted, with satisfaction. "Allus select a night like this, for nefarious business, if you wish to succeed. The louder the din the greater surety of success."

And the thunder was not lacking. It soon came in deep detonating tones, one clap following another until there seemed to be one constant pounding, jarring cannonade of sound.

The lightning flashed and flitted in vivid zig-zags, now and then making plain to view the little skiff with its two occupants.

Rain soon came down, in torrents, whereupon the thunder and lightning grew less frequent.

While Darcy Drew manipulated the oars, Dick took advantage of the flashes to scan the shore for the widening of the trail, and the cave entrance in the mountain-side, of which Moses Monk had spoken.

At last he discovered it, and directed his father to pull in to shore.

"The next thing is, how are we going to work this little game?" Dick said. "It will be dangerous to enter the cave boldly, as she may be on the watch and lay for us!"

"I have thought of all that, and planned accordingly," the elder Drew exclaimed. "We will land, and climb to the ledge, in front of the cave. Here we will make an argument, the drift of which will be that Bill Blake sent us for Mary Monk and the girl, and that you are afraid, and so forth. She will no doubt overhear us and listen, and on finding we come from Blake, will be ready to go to him."

"How know you this?"

"Easy enough. She used to be in love with Blake, and he was kind to her, and you can bet she would be glad to get back to him."

"I comprehend. For ideal scheming you are unsurpassed!" Dick said.

They pulled in to the shore, and fastened their boat; then they began the ascent of the mountain.

It was no easy job, and considerable time was occupied in reaching the ledge.

Here the two villains became seated and lit their pipes.

"I tell ye, I don't like that job," Dick Drew growled, in a loud tone. "Ef the captain wanted the gal, why the blazes didn't he come fer her himself? Furst ye know, she'll pop us over."

"Pooh! what ye skeered at? Cap knows his biz, you bet! Didn't he say as how et would be all right? Well, I opine he did, that. He sed

as how the gal, Mary Monk, used ter be in his employ, when he was known as Bill Blake, and that as he an' her war good friends, he felt certain she would want ter see him, now."

"Yas; I kno' he did, but the gal not knowin' this, is likely ter take us fer enemies, instead o' friends, an' give us an ounce or two o' cold lead, instead o' a warmer reception."

"Git out! She'll be tickled nigh to death, when she finds out Blake sent fer her."

"Waal, mebbe. How did he find out she war neer?"

"Dunno, 'cept that he found et out down at the minin' camp!"

"You think he's struck on the gal, eh?"

"'Pears to me so. He's allus talkin' about her."

Then there was a pause, during which the two villains puffed away at their pipes vigorously, while Mary Monk was standing just behind them, in the cave entrance, with pale, frightened face, scarcely breathing lest they should hear her.

She was armed; practice had made her a good shot. Why, then, should she not make her presence known?

"Gentlemen!" she said, holding her weapon in readiness.

The two Drews wheeled in great surprise.

"Hold! ma'am; don't fire!" the older exclaimed. "We're friends."

"I overheard your conversation. Who are you?"

"Waal, mum, we're what air commonly known as road-agents, an' we belong to Apollo Bill's gang."

"Exactly, and, judging by your conversation, you were sent here to capture me?"

"No, mum—not to capture you, but ter fetch ye back to our captain's camp, ef you were willin'."

"Am I to understand that your captain sent for me?"

"Yes, mum."

"And your captain's name is William Blake, is it?"

"Yes, mum."

"Where is this camp located?"

"Waal, I dunno as I'm right to tell, but seein' as you an' the capt'in aire friends, I dunno as there is any harm in tellin' you. Et's on an island in the river, below McGuffin's, whar no one he ever tho't o' lookin' fer us."

Mary was silent several moments.

"I believe I will go with you," she said, finally, "for I desire very much to see your captain. You will please wait here until I am ready."

With this she re-entered the cavern.

In the course of half an hour she reappeared, carrying a child in her arms.

"Lead on, and I will follow," she said.

They obeyed without demur.

It had stopped raining, and the clouds overhead were gradually breaking away, but it was still dark.

On reaching the river, Dick Drew helped Mary and her charge to a seat in the stern of the boat, while he took up his station at the prow, and his foster-father again held the oars.

The frail craft was soon gliding swiftly along with the current, like a thing of life.

McGuffin's was passed, and, half an hour later, the boat ran upon the sandy beach of a small island.

"Here we are!" Dick Drew announced, leaping out followed by his father; "allow me to assist you out."

Mary allowed him to lift her out, but it was a fatal action.

His arms clutched about her, and while he thus held her, despite her struggles, the elder Drew securely bound her, hand and foot, thrust a gag into her mouth, and blindfolded her.

He then took her from Dick's arms and carried her into the depth of the woods, Dick following with the screaming child.

They soon came to a log cabin, which they entered, to find themselves in a rudely furnished apartment, where a fire was burning and light was furnished by a torch.

Madame Moree sat by the fire, but arose, as they entered.

"We've caught the bird, and you are her jailer!" Drew, Sr., said, as he thrust Mary into an inner room, and locked the door. "The kid you can keep here. We shall be here, again, in a couple of days, to perfect our arrangements. It is perfectly understood between us—you are staying here, as jaileress, at a salary of a hundred a week!"

"Exactly!" madame assented.

"Then, we must be off, and back to camp ere it is daylight. Look well to your charges!"

Madame Moree was good for her word, as long as that night lasted, but that was all. The next morning she left the island in a boat, and took the child with her.

About an hour after her departure, a boat was beached upon the island, and Darcy Drew and Dick stepped therefrom, and plunged into the forest.

Fifteen minutes afterward, another boat reached the island, and two more persons disembarked.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCLUSION.

THE latter boat had landed several rods further down the beach, in a little inlet, and consequently out of sight of the first boat.

The occupants were Rowdy Kate and the Trail Tornado, Apollo Bill.

"I hope you are right, but I fear that this is a wild-goose chase," the road-agent said, as they disembarked. "I don't believe Mary Monk and the child are on this island."

"Mebbe they ain't, but I see'd the two Drews a-comin' from this direction, and I opine et looked something like it to me."

Small though the island, more than an hour was spent in search, ere they came to the old log-cabin, the door of which was partly open.

"Ha! didn't I tell you?" Rowdy Kate exclaimed. "That's the place where Mary Monk is to be found. Ah! hark!"

The sounds of pitiful groans of some person came from the direction of the cabin.

"By blazes! some one's hurt, an' that's certain!" Kate cried. "Come, let's make a rush!"

Accordingly they dashed forward, and into the cabin through the open door.

But they paused near the threshold—paused aghast at what met their gaze.

Upon the floor in front of them, bound hand and foot, and gagged, lay Mary Monk, her face distorted with the pain of acute suffering.

Her back had been bared, and was one intricate mass of bleeding cuts, evidently inflicted by a bull-whip, which lay near at hand.

Both Bill and Rowdy Kate were at her side an instant later, cries of horror breaking from their lips, and Bill gently raised her head upon his lap.

"Mary! Mary! do you know me?" he asked, bending over her, and kissing her on the lips. "Speak to me, Mary—I am Bill—Bill Blake!"

The sound of his voice seemed to arouse her, and she opened her eyes and gazed up into his face.

"Is it you, Master Bill? Oh! thank God!" she murmured, gazing at him wistfully. "I have so long wished to see you, Bill—I—I have spent all these years, faithful to you, Bill, knowing we should meet sooner or later."

"God bless you, Mary! I always knew you were a good, true girl. But you are hurt, Mary—you have been cruelly abused! Tell me who is the wretch who did this devilish brutality?"

A shudder passed through her frame before she answered.

"Yes, I have been killed—I have been maltreated until I am dying. Oh! Bill, it was awful, but it is all over now. They captured me and brought me here last night, and placed me in charge of a woman who told me her name was Madame Moree, and that she was going to take the child to Lord Clifford. This morning she left, and not long afterward Ben Boghart and another ruffian came. They found the child gone, and were furious. They swore if I did not tell them whose child it was they would beat me to death. Of course I refused, and they treated me so brutally that I partly fainted. Believing me dead, they hurried me off a short time before you came."

"Then, Mary, my brave girl, hear me swear here, and before High Heaven, that your wrongs shall be avenged!" Apollo Bill cried, sternly. "Kate will stay here with you until I send back a boat to convey you to McGuffin's, where I will have arrangements made for your comfort. But first, Mary, before it is too late, tell me—is the child you have watched over and guarded so faithfully *mine* or Lord Clifford's?"

"Bill—thank God—it is *yours*! The child has been carefully reared, and knows her own name, *Nelly Blake*!"

Then she sunk back, exhausted.

With tears rolling down his cheeks, Apollo Bill kissed her once more; then calling Rowdy Kate aside, he addressed a few words to her in a low tone, after which he took his departure.

Madame Moree went straight from the island to McGuffin's and to the room of Lord Clifford, but she did not take the child with her. His lordship was engaged in reading, but he arose and greeted her pleasantly.

"Well, I suppose you have come to bring me news?" he said.

"Yes, I have," she replied. "I took ~~some~~ advice and went into the employ of Dick Drew and his foster-father, and as a result I have obtained possession of your child."

"Very well; so far, so good. Now, then, how do you know it is my child?"

"Very well. The Drews made Mary Monk confess the truth, and she stated that it was Lord Clifford's child she had taken with her, on the night of the fire at the farm-house."

"Madame Moree, are you lying to me?"

"Lord Clifford, I am not."

"Then why do you not produce the child?"

The madame smiled.

"You must remember, my lord, that there is a consideration to be agreed upon."

"Ah! of course. I am perfectly willing to pay you a fair compensation, but of course, you could not reasonably expect me to pay ~~you~~ the rewards I have offered, as they were merely baits to gain information."

"I presumed you were the kind of a ~~man~~ to back your own propositions. However, that matters not to me, as it is not money I ~~want~~."

"Not money?"

"No, not money. I have another price than money, Lord Clifford, you shall know of it. As the case stands, you shall have it. I, Madame Moree, the last surviving member of the once distinguished Moree family of Paris, have come into possession of your only child, little Lady Maude Clifford, sole heiress of Clifford Cliff, England. To you this child is all in all, for were she to die, Lady Theresa would succeed to your estate, in event of your death, and Dick Drew would wear your shoes. Therefore, it is, of course, important to you that your child comes to light as your heir and successor."

"Now, I am not a bad woman, but as I told you, I have to live by my wits, and never to let an opportunity to make money slip by. On coming into possession of your child, I drugged her with a peculiar poison, of which I always have a supply, and took her to a place of safety until I could come and see you. This drug has but one antidote, and I doubt if a physician in America understands it. If allowed to sleep two hours from now, she will be dead. You will therefore readily perceive that I have the destiny of your heir all in my own hands."

"My God! Heaven help her!" Lord Clifford gasped, covering his face with his hands.

"Woman! devil! go on and name your price!" he added after a moment's pause.

"I will do so. My price is your hand in marriage within half an hour!"

"Great Heaven! are you mad?"

"Not in the least. You can do as you please. I will go and bring the child here, and a minister. When I am joined to you in wedlock the child shall have the antidote. You can have a few minutes to consider; in the mean time, I will bring the child!"

And, with a mocking courtesy, she swept from the room, leaving the nobleman pacing the floor, with a pale face and wildly glaring eyes.

Madame went down-stairs to the hotel office.

"There is a miner here who is an ordained

minister, is there not—working in a mine or somewhere?" she asked of the clerk at the bar.

"Yes'm; 'spect John Doe does that kind o' business, but ye can't git him off durin' workin' hours. 'Spect we can fix ye, tho', fer yonder's a new arrival sittin' over thar who registers as the Reverend Simeon Shaver. Better go tackle him."

Madame gazed at the individual indicated a moment sharply—then walked over to him.

He was a good-sized man, respectably dressed, with a long gray beard, and wore a plug hat.

"Excuse me," madame said, "but I was told that you are an ordained minister. Is that true?"

"Yes'm," was the reply, in a squeaky voice, "that is my calling."

"Then prepare yourself to marry a couple on my return, and you will be well paid."

Then the madame left the hotel.

In twenty minutes she returned, carrying an apparently sleeping child in her arms, and motioned the minister to follow her up-stairs, which he did.

They both entered Lord Clifford's room, and madame laid the child upon the bed, and said:

"There is your child, my lord, and here"—holding up a small vial—"is the antidote that will save her life. See! I lay it on the table, within my reach! Marry me, and I will let you give the contents to your child. Refuse, and I will smash the vial into atoms."

"Stop! I have made up my mind to save my child's life at all hazards!" his lordship cried.

The minister took out his book and read over a marriage service, after which he asked the usual questions, and, later, pronounced Lord Clifford and Madame Moree man and wife.

"Now, then!" his lordship cried, "give my child whatever will bring it back to life and sense!"

Without a word the madame turned and poured the contents of the vial between the sleeping child's lips, and then, waiting a few seconds, shook the little sleeper, who readily awakened.

"Ha! ha! a good trick to win a husband, but you have failed, woman!" a stern voice cried, that caused Clifford and the madame to wheel around.

Ah! what transformation was this?

The minister had thrown off his false wig and beard, and Apollo Bill, fierce and accusing, stood confronting them, a revolver in either hand.

"Lord Clifford!" he cried, "you have been duped, and you have to thank me that you are not in reality yonder viper's husband. She, sir, was once my wife, and yonder, on that bed, sits the child she bore me. Your child, unfortunately, perished. The author of that heinous crime was the elder of the two so-called Drews, of this place, from whom you woman stole my child. If you doubt my word, you have but to ask Mary Monk, who lies at the point of death at Forbes's shanty. It was she who escaped with my child. That is all I have to say, sir. I take my child and go. I warn both of you to make no attempt to hinder me, for if you do, I'll drop you in your tracks!"

Then he quickly resumed his disguise, and taking little Nellie by the hand, backed out of the room.

Neither Clifford nor madame attempted to stop him; both had had sufficient knowledge of him to assure them that it would not be best.

The next day was one of tragic interest in the annals of McGuffin's smiling town.

Early in the forenoon the bodies of Dick Drew and Lady Theresa were found in the Drew mansion, stark and stiff!

After attending to her burial, Lord Clifford left McGuffin's, *en route* for his native country, a sadder but wiser man in the ways of the world.

The same day the body of Darcy Drew was found just outside of town suspended to the limb of a tree, and upon his breast was pinned a paper, upon which was written the following:

"Beware! Behold the fate of a human wretch, whose deeds brought upon him this retribution. His first crime may have been small but the older he grew the greater wretch he became, until it was necessary to elevate him to the limb of a tree, where he will have pure air and protection from wolves. Thus ends Ben Boghart. APOLLO BILL."

After that, little was heard of the bold road-agent around McGuffin's.

While Mary Monk lived, he was often at her bedside, in disguise, but no more stage robberies were heard of, and his name and fame soon became a thing of the past in that region.

When Mary Monk died, she willed Rowdy Kate what wealth she had inherited by her cousin's death, and since then, Kate has become one of the richest "catches" in the mining town upon the bend.

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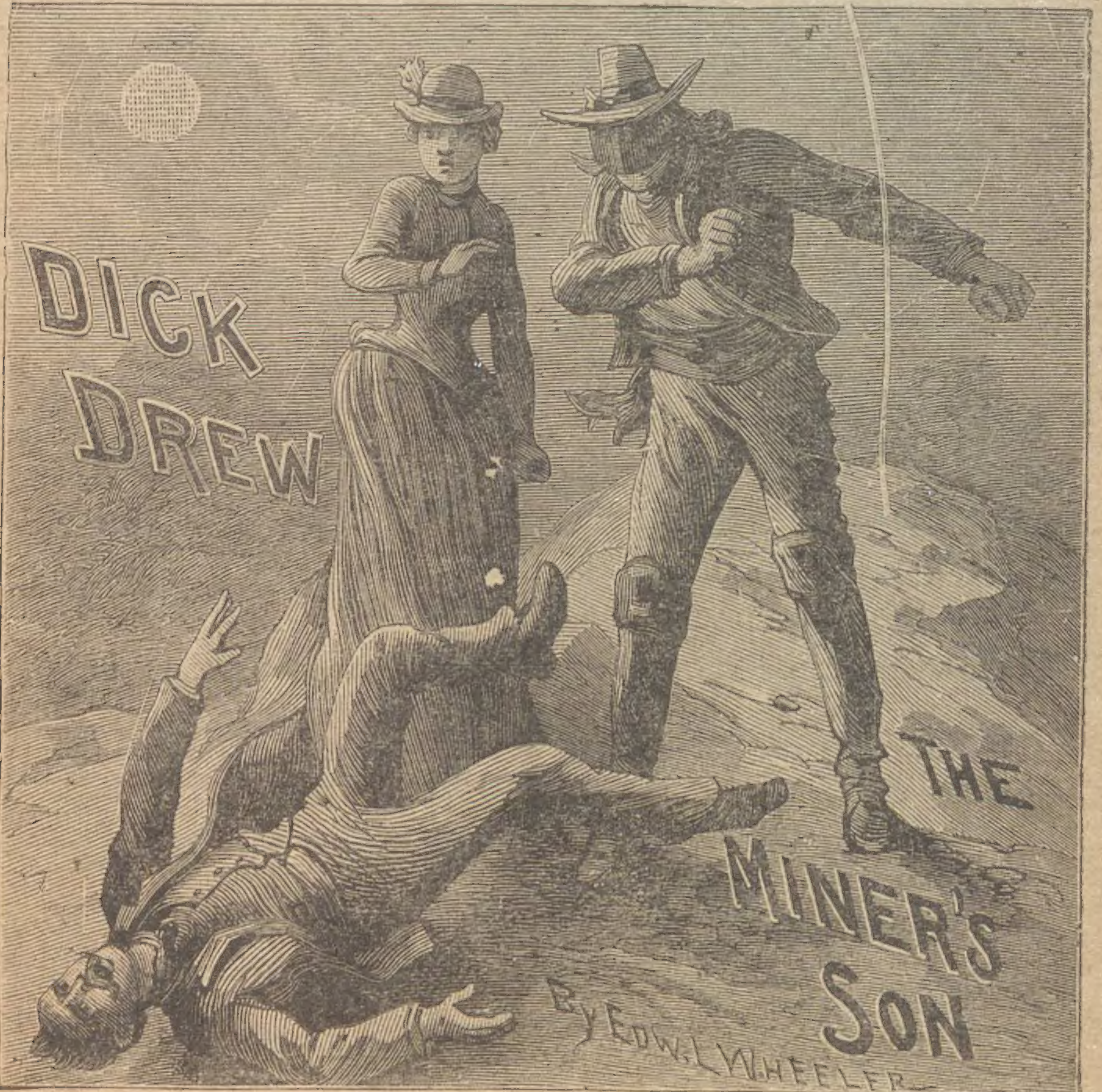


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